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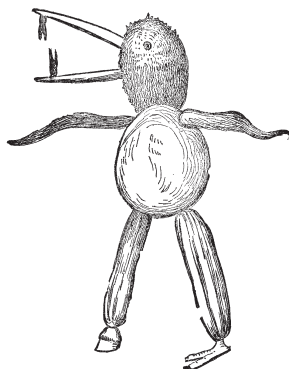


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NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS

CONTENTS

- 7 *Sonnet 3.0*
 ROWAN RICARDO PHILLIPS
- 8 *Black Peculiar :: Energy Complex*
 KHADIJAH QUEEN
- 15 *The Pirate Who Does Not Know the Value of Pi*
 EUGENE OSTASHEVSKY
- 18 *The Happy Cloud*
 CHRISTOPHER DEWEESE
- 20 *Borderless Country*
 KAMILAH AISHA MOON
- 22 *Two Poems*
 KARLA KELSEY
- 24 *passing*
 LATASHA N. NEVADA DIGGS
- 26 **jubilat** *Interview*
 JOHN YAU
- 50 *Three Poems*
 SOLMAZ SHARIF
- 55 *Army of Another*
 NANCE VAN WINCKEL
- 56 *Night Journey*
 SUZANNE GARDINIER

- 62 *Two Poems*
PAUL FATTARUSO
- 64 *from The Reader Series, 2009*
JEN LIU
- 70 *Two Poems*
L. S. KLATT
- 72 *Back Spin of Hope*
AFAA M. WEAVER
- 80 *Late Makeup Years and Decline (1979–1983)*
DOBBY GIBSON & MATT HART
- 82 *Survey Says*
BRETT FLETCHER LAUER
- 87 *haiku (failed)*
NICK FLYNN
- 88 *from Exit 43*
JENNIFER SCAPPETTONE
- 92 *Hermetic*
JOANNA KLINK
- 140 *The body, a myth*
METTA SÁMA
- 147 *In McPherson County*
JESSE NATHAN
- 150 *A Reified Melody In The Architecture*
RANDALL HORTON

Cover by Jen Liu (*Moments of Awareness; The Reader Series, 2009*)

SONNET 3.0

Rowan Ricardo Phillips

There is no singing of her though I sing

Of her This is always a bad idea

But these are the habits of the poets

The old habits I've picked up peeling love

From blank pages and love from letters

Undulating their cold feathers above

The sunk red line of the slowly rising

Night There is no singing of her She is

Not a habit of the brain She is real

And as with all things real some sealed chance sounds

Inside her An insight of her hers alone

To know alone and prosperous of Fill in the Blank Create

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BLACK PECULIAR:: ENERGY COMPLEX

7 POSSIBLE SETS OF ANALOGIES TO IMAGINARY
LETTERS

Khadijah Queen

I.

Marked upon :: *relational* dark
diabetic :: aesthetics

Dear Puppets,
I want to make you say things I cannot. But I don't
want your mouths to move.

stitched shut :: *slipshod*
material :: immovable

Dear Buttons,
I cannot sew you on properly without my favorite
needle. Wait just a moment while I dig it out.

dysphoria :: metaphysical toilets
burned tendons :: *drunken interest*

Dear Master,
I am running away from you now.

2.

peculiar to :: *dark-skinned*
milquetoast :: imagining

Dear Mother,
I am white haired and bundled with fear.

cante hondo :: blade shimmer
ultimate drowning :: *bootleg spirituality*

Dear Law,
Where is my sequential unfoldment?

essential abstract :: *inter, inter*
internal contrast :: heated signal

Dear Silence,
I jumped the source tracks. The prayer came before
I could judge it. We had a meeting. I cannot tell you
what was said.

3.

alluring meat :: Derridean
abundance :: *interference*

Dear Invincible Reference Point,

Let's say we take a certain counterpoint out of the picture. The moment of strangulation, perhaps. If the peculiar energy becomes complex, just call it black. Simplify.

applicable commitments :: *attention! attention!*
immediate :: biochemical appreciation

Dear Alignment,

First I questioned the witching. Then I created, siphoned something pure in the marked cooling.

alluring meat :: come across
nonentities :: *superceding*

Dear Reader,

Do you want me to keep going? Or has the profane frequency been reached?

4.

destined appendix :: simultaneous orchestra
opposition :: unknown

Dear Anxiety,

I named my puppy after you, not thinking he had
any chance of being run over.

defenseless :: sutra

Bruce Lee proverb :: *enclosed environment*

Dear Hermit,

You scoffed at my rainbow. Fuck you.

revision :: wholeness

tactile :: conspiracy

Dear Acceptance,

I didn't respond ably when I wished it was so.
Therefore, I follow you with cinematic intention.

5.

prayerful fang :: *willingness*
brush painting :: fatback

Dear Seer,
I couldn't stop hugging the leftovers.

objectified:: *observed*
karma :: *evolutionary stagnation*

Dear Interference,
I have a habit of sitting too close to the television.
When I look, I'm not really looking. I eat the terrible
stories.

default:: dissed
dream :: fault

Dear Blame,
I made the mistake of believing in an everyday
perfect. I curled around it as if material. Especially
animal. I didn't peek.

6.

scattershot :: blind

Caravaggio :: corridor to integral aftermath

Dear Grief,

Please release me from this literacy.

request :: familiar pause

innocence :: backpedal

Dear Scar Tissue,

I want my softness to be safe.

determination :: perpetual

leveling :: potentiality

Dear Future Mistakes,

Please stop laughing.

7.

finality :: compassion

chronic abandonment :: *foresee*

Dear Authority,

The wilder seasons in North Carolina make the green that much more precious and terrifying. Wait. It's Ella. Tisket. Tisket. I will do all the naming.

intuit :: against mercy

far far beyond :: *linked consequence*

Dear Fruit,

I chose not to eat you today. You looked so delicious I did not think I deserved to strip off your skin with my teeth and let your tart sticky liquor drip down my throat even though I was both hungry and thirsty. I believe there's beauty in an untouched thing. I could have devoured you but didn't. I am not a very good animal. I talk too much.

either/or :: *appropriation*

caused action :: computation

Dear Body,

I planted the wax. Let's find out what's inside.

THE PIRATE WHO DOES NOT KNOW THE VALUE OF PI

Eugene Ostashevsky

POEM 6

THE PIRATE SAILS the Spanish Main
His ship describes a Markov chain

He stands at the bow and downs champagne
feeling the salty air

The parrot squints from a migraine
and would rather be elsewhere

I often think about the relationship of experience to language,
says the Pirate Who Does Not Know the Value of Pi

All these things happen to us and we can't always match them with
words:
How does that make them different?

Am I asking for something that, like, *scire nefas*, *Leuconoe*,
or can one maintain a position on the divergence between the verbal
and the nonverbal?

With us, for instance, since you are so much more verbal than I,
is your experience of this sea essentially other than mine?—and I mean
“essentially,”—

Furthermore, can I in any way understand an experience that is other than mine, an experience that is authentically *your* experience, or rather *my* experience, but with the pronoun referring to somebody other than me?

In the same way, if I had a girlfriend, how might I give her subjectivity its full due,

thereby treating another human being as Kant says she deserves to be treated
already by the virtue of her humanity, and additionally by the virtue of her girlfriendness-towards-me?

Would I need to draw attention away from the signs and symptoms of our difference, such as, for instance, the more foregrounded of our sexual characteristics?

Or would it on the contrary be best to say straight out “Here are your sexual characteristics and here are mine. They seem to be quite different. I don’t really know what to do about that. I admit that it frightens me.”

I admit that a lot of things frighten me. The other day, for example, when we attacked that merchantman
bound for wherever it was bound—like for Alba Longa from Cartagena, no?—and boarded it for its cargo of regret

as I advanced against the enemy captain with my lucky falchion, the one whose scabbard has my mother’s beadwork of quotations from Sydney Dobell, he of the Spasmodic school,
in my right hand and my blunderbuss #32 in my left—

there was cannon smoke everywhere and splashes of blood and the hoarse shouts of the mortally wounded or the simply overexcited—

he fought real well, I must say, with his two scimitars and a hand cannon, at least until I chopped off his right arm—wait, was it his left?—no, it was on my left, so it must have been his right—

I suddenly became frightened—I don't really know of what—that I wouldn't be able to represent any of this in language and the experience would vanish from the sensory world but at the same time take root inside me

unformulated; ineffable; and therefore not even truly a thing; certainly not truly mine
yet also no one else's but mine; mine exclusively, inalienably

and so locking me at once inside and outside itself
although always in solitary confinement as it were, like Küchelbecker in the Peter and Paul Fortress but without the tapping code

and also the fortress ineffable, and the guards, and Küchelbecker himself
and also with Küchelbecker being not just in the role of Küchelbecker but also the guard of Küchelbecker

all the while remaining ineffable and impalpable and incorporeal
but at the same time barely kind of uncomfortably restless, just a bit, almost imperceptibly but still uncomfortable

THE HAPPY CLOUD

Christopher DeWeese

I don't like the atmosphere;
it has completely forgotten me.
I don't like hunters.
They bring their children with,
clutching foam arrows.
They think the forest is a logo.
For them, swimming is more important
than almost anything.
They write essays
about how the water feels
like better skin.
When I was young,
I must have been a whisper.
I had to clean things up,
so I found a little rain,
pinched my edges together
like a machine
for telling fortunes.
I want to invent a new stroke
but I need a better harness,
something more effective
than the laboratory's casual wind.
If I could convince
a dozen hunters
to shoot at me,
one hundred geese
might startle from the bulrushes,

lift me up
where the indefinite sky
tears so slowly
the elements migrate.
Wings are like scissors
if you misunderstand
a fulcrum,
I mean what's the difference
between a bag of helium
and a bag of oxygen?
It has to do with emotions.
It's so like a compass
to spin in place, to break
where the air gets thin.
I don't have teeth.
I'm afraid of outer space.
I cannot pronounce anything.

BORDERLESS COUNTRY

Kamilah Aisha Moon

1 in 150 now, this glitch
in babies poised to unlock the world
These daughters and sons of poets,
store clerks, salesmen, singers,
CEOs, janitors, actors cast
into this permanent script
Souls we love turned
like the faces of flowers thrust
toward a rogue sun

We are the earth we walk; what seeps
here? Is the air fighting back?
Is the water slowing baskets down,
sending them back upstream? Are we changing?
Dear God, are they here
to tell us, in a way we cannot ignore,
that we aren't changing
fast enough?

Autism, the one-drop rule for minds
we strain to understand, the catchall
phrase that drops kids off
at nowhere,
at you don't exist once you turn 18,
at native tongue of one,
at white-knuckled translation cobbled
through touch across time,
at marquee symptoms

while causes lurk,
at beauty that demands
seas of patience

What about that drug I took once? Vaccines?
Some karmic boomerang I don't remember
throwing, its stealth return

1 in 150 apples of somebody's eye
1 in 150 'my baby'
1 in 150 now, a new child
breathes, private riddles
of our loving strapped
on many backs

I6.I

Karla Kelsey

As if created to do the founding, love let go
the ground, spoke the barrier / of lilacs. Spoke
past rifts created: you threw me soundings of set woes—
we found, woke sea's carrier / doves. Tied back, choked,
sea 'round broke. See, wary, her/ doves died back, smoked
this measure, closure, stele, live—
a sound mote. A buried Ur, / love's eyes ask hope,
wish pleasure, plovers, Estrella's fires
miss-savored over. Well's a lie
in the bright, bare grasp of a room
winning spite, rare asps shoving doom:
I give you my digital, my radial, my baldest baby
lies. Tributize with it all. Try raiding lulls. Sight calls this "maybe."

I 7. I

Tributaries lead the river out of sight—
stars have gone out on the walls.
Tributes, weary, need me, quiver-mouthed delight,
Mars, salve strong, bouts song then falls—
a trigger sweaty. Just thinking of the hand
the rigger's testy. Trust sinking loathes me—land,
something dreamed the fire would quench it.
One's thing's schemed, a liar's world's dented—
they were birds and they fell through the sky sideways.
Now we study it and it doesn't hurt anymore,
day-turned words, lands say hell flew the skies, byways
bowed, seas muddy tipped man. It doesn't hurt anymore—
stars have gone out on the walls.
Our sad wrongs shout down the hall.

PASSING

LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs

- ... the artist is born of Trinidadian-Canadian parents
- ... based in Miami, the artist
- ... the artist of Irish and Cherokee ancestry
- ... her work oscillates between the illusionary potential of performance
- ... was born and raised in Brooklyn
- ... the artist is of Dine and African descent
- ... artist, vocalist, curator, publisher, playwright, producer, filmmaker, actor ...
- ... the artist's works touch on seemingly disparate histories
- ... is a socio-political Marxist artist that coined the term "post black" in conceptual art.
- ... his delectably abject work is a tactile, layered, somatic and multilingual re-telling...
- ... born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, the artist
- ... her work investigates the Afri-sci-fi narrative in the black transgendered body
- ... he is a Chicano artist
- ... explores identity and conformity by photographing himself...
- ... is originally from White Cone, Arizona, on the Navajo Reservation.
- ... is represented by Sikkema; Jenkins and Co.
- ... her work, rooted in her Midwestern upbringing as a Korean adoptee
- ... the artist is a registered tribal member of the Shawnee
- ... crafting post post-colonial iconographies in Peruvian pottery
- ... he examines his Ugandan roots
- ... has exhibited in Morocco, South Africa, Pittsburg, Berlin, Tate Modern. . .
- ... she lives and works in Bogotá, Colombia
- ... is Chippewa of the Deer Clan and born for the Mexican Clan.

- ... she explores displacement and identity in culturally specific markers
- ... was born in Ghana in 1971 and grew up in Nashville
- ... probing the physical weight of sculpture and Dominican carnival masks ...
- ... uses the study of ethnological objects, popular icons, and the Dadaist tradition to explore cultural and creative syncretism, art history, and politics.

WHAT THE POET SEES: AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN YAU

John Yau is the author of over fifty books, including *Exhibits* (2010), *Paradiso Diaspora* (2006), *Ing Grish* (2005), and *Borrowed Love Poems* (2002). His book of essays, *The Passionate Spectator*, was published by the University of Michigan in the “Poets on Poetry” series in 2006. Yau’s collaborations include *Blackboards* (with Tomaž Šalamun and Michael Biggins), *100 More Jokes from the Book of the Dead* (with Archie Rand), and *Berlin Diptychon* (with Bill Barrette), and his books of art criticism include *A Thing Among Things: The Art of Jasper Johns* (2008), *The United States of Jasper Johns* (1996), and *In the Realm of Appearances: The Art of Andy Warhol* (1993). Yau has received the Lavan Award from the Academy of American Poets, the *American Poetry Review* Jerome Shestack Award, and a 1988 New York Foundation for the Arts Award. He is also the recipient of a 1977 National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, two Ingram-Merrill Foundation Fellowships, and grants from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation. Named as a Chevalier of the Order of the Arts and Letters by the French government, Yau is on the faculty of the Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, and edits Black Square Editions. This interview was conducted by Matthew Cooperman on July 30, 2005, in Boulder, Colorado.

::

There is a great tradition of poet-art critics—New York School poets John Ashbery and Frank O’Hara, as well as Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Stéphane Mallarmé, and so on. How did the role of “poet-art critic” develop for you?

When I was at Bard College I met a sculptor/teacher, Jake Grossberg. We

became friends, and at one point fairly early on he said, “Do you know that lots of poets write criticism?” I wasn’t actually that aware of it, and I began to do research. I looked at *Arts Magazine* and various other places—*Art in America* and *ARTnews*, where John Ashbery was one of the editors. I read the art criticism of poets and went back to Apollinaire, went back to Baudelaire, and I suppose that’s where I also got the idea that a poet could survive in America outside of the academy. I knew then that I didn’t want to teach in an English literature department.

It sounds like it started as a survival tactic. At what point did it seem to become a necessity, or something that was necessary to your process?

I think it was both survival and a necessity right from the beginning. Survival in the sense that I would make some money—certainly it was not very much, but you could also live on less than. And a necessity in the sense that I felt that I would be able to practice the craft of writing, and that I would learn about looking and seeing, and that what was important was paying attention to the thing you were looking at. If you know the writing of *Art in America*, what it promotes is a kind of descriptive writing. So I thought, “Oh, I can learn how to describe these things in front of me,” and at the same time I would be writing, and learning about art, and I would be paid for it, which seemed completely wonderful. I thought, “Oh, I am going to be paid to educate myself.” You might say I was rather naïve. I remember a friend of mine described my first review, not inaccurately, as seeming like I had spent an entire weekend in the closet looking at this one painting. I was trying to look really closely at it, because I didn’t know how else to talk about the painting. I had to learn the history as I went along, of how to look at things in context, and then I had to figure out the context I believed in, rather than the received notions of context that had been developed by Clement Greenberg and others. Of course, I had to see what was in front of me, really see it, and not succumb to someone else’s idea about it or art.

What would you say are your prevailing preoccupations?

Within the generation of abstract painters that are, say, 40 and older (I'm 55), there's the preoccupation of what painting could do after Jackson Pollock, without being nostalgic or revivalist, and the relationship between the notion of the death of the author and the death of originality. And tracing the moment that the demographics of the art world changed, with a number of women painters coming forward that hadn't been acknowledged or were being ignored. Or artists of color not being overtly political, but working within traditions that would by nature ignore them in the history of abstraction. Those are some of my preoccupations. I think a lot of different things sort of come in and out. I'm interested in painters of Pollock's generation, who are slightly younger—the second generation, who are often overlooked. Alfred Jensen, Norman Bluhm, and Charles Seliger started showing around the same time that Pollock did, but aren't seen in that context or are seen historically as just a small blip on the screen. Jasper Johns is a major preoccupation. And I'm preoccupied with keeping aware of younger artists.

*That comes up in your catalogue *Young, Brash, and Abstract*. Was that an attempt to try to do service to young artists who are not getting the press they might deserve?*

In a way. Not only do you enter history at a certain moment in the art world, but you also enter commodity status, where you make the commodity that people desire. It seems there are a lot of artists who are very good that don't really ever hit that level.

Do you see a similar thing—this sort of cult of the first book—going on in the poetry world?

I think certain poets get fetishized by others, and they gain a particular

status in the discourse, while others never gain that status. In the art world you become known as a young artist, and then . . . take the example of Jonathan Lasker. He gets well known in America early on, but all of his museum shows have taken place in Europe. He probably won't get a museum show in America until he's much older, which I think is rather shameful.

Do you think that's a function of the fact that he changed his work?

Perhaps it's that, but I think we just want to pay attention to certain artists, certain poets, and that discourses get shaped around them . . . they become cogs in a narrative machine. There are the great generations of the abstract expressionists, the pop artists, and the minimalists, and the conceptual artists, but it seems that we don't know how to see the next generation of painters because lots of people still believe that painting is dead, and because there seems to be no central concern. For example, Mary Heilmann—she was born in the forties and never had a museum show in America that I know of. But she's had major museum shows in Europe, with beautiful monographs. I think the narrative of the death of the painter, or the death of the author, has played a very strong role in this absence and neglect.

It seems true in literature as well: there is a dogma of the time, however tacit, that becomes a pervasive kind of retinal block—how, for instance, the acceptance of the death of originality or the death of painting itself is also the acceptance of the death of the author or the death of a fixed human presence. I'm thinking of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry as that shared aesthetic dogma, and how that's had much greater play in America than in Europe.

I think there are some parallels. In art, I suppose there are equivalents of, say, Marjorie Perloff representing or championing a certain group of poets and Helen Vendler championing another. There is the anthology *Art Since*

1900: *Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, written by Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, Hal Foster, and Rosalind Krauss. They all have disagreements with each other, but they did work collectively (at least in this anthology). It's one telling of art that will predominate until another bunch comes along to tell it differently—but, there may not be that kind of balance. These theorists have students and pass the torch along to them. I don't mean that in some heavy way, but there's a discourse that's set in place, and for many it's difficult to develop alternative readings. So there are presumptions made in the art world. I would say that there are also presumptions made in the poetry world.

In a recent lecture you mentioned the importance of Baudelaire's essay "The Painter of Modern Life" in your conception of art criticism and the poet's relationship to the genre. In the essay he talks about wanting a criticism that is partial, passionate, and political, as well as amusing and poetic. Could you comment on the importance of that essay to your conception of art criticism, and whether you agree with that sort of partial, passionate, political model?

Baudelaire wants the critic to talk about art that exists in the present that he and the artist exist in. The focus becomes about not just what art is, but its relation to the viewer, and to the larger thing called culture. That, I think, is really important. It is out of that understanding of Baudelaire that Frank O'Hara comes up with the term "the living situation." I'm interested in the living situation. It's a partial view, because how do people step outside of the time they live in to sum it up? And it's also partial because it's you implicating yourself and your own passion, say, for a particular artist's work or a particular thing. You realize your views are partial in that sense. In a number of ways it's not complete. I don't have a paradigm to fit everything into because I cannot sum up the moment I live in.

Do you think that attention to "the living situation" is something that the more classically trained art historian is not able to occupy, or less able to?

Or unwilling to—yeah, I think that has some truth to it. When you have a paradigm, you can always believe that you're right, but when you're writing about art in the present you have to "go on your nerve alone" to bring back O'Hara. And the worst thing is to be wrong—many art writers are afraid to be wrong. I mean Baudelaire is writing about Constantin Guys. Not a whole lot of people think about him as an artist, but the essay itself is interesting and has all kinds of implications. He's not writing about Manet in that piece, he's writing about a lesser-known newspaper artist. Being wrong isn't as bad as it's cracked up to be.

But it's the relationship to the times—the Salon of 1845 and so on, that creates cultural context.

Right, and the way it opens up, that's a great possibility. Few people have been able to do that. Some essays are just about what's in front of you. I love Leo Steinberg more than I like Clement Greenberg, Steinberg being the counterpoint to Greenberg. At that moment when Greenberg's formulating a paradigm, Steinberg's looking at the object. So I think there's a theory-driven critic, and an object-driven critic. I would say I am an object-driven critic. But once you're object-driven and you don't have a paradigm, one of the things you realize is that for every one thing you are looking at there are thirty things you haven't looked at. You become aware of time and mortality in a different way. You realize how little you know as you proceed through the world. So whatever authority you have, you've earned it in your writing, but you also realize it's not a huge authority—it's a small authority, and maybe it's useful to a few other people.

Do you think that's also the fact that a poet-critic is constantly triangulating between two disciplines, so the very writing about art invokes the possibility of writing? Or how summing up or describing one medium in terms of another invokes the partiality and limits of a given discipline?

You know, Greenberg proposed what the future would be based on what had happened! I don't want to do that; I don't think I know what's going to happen next. Also, to go back to the death of the author—I started reading poetry and fiction at the moment in the sixties when there was a lot of talk about the death of the novel. Then suddenly Gabriel García Márquez came along and the whole notion of the death of the novel was quietly gotten rid of. So when I came to the death of painting I had the memory of hearing about the death of the novel—the death of painting seems to me the same thing. Ever since the advent of photography, critics and theorists have pronounced that painting is dead and they chose to ignore all the people who are painting (and in some cases they rigorously ignore them). But I don't think painting ever died—it has been going on since the cave painters. There were always people thinking about what Pollock had done and what to do afterwards. Even in Pollock's own generation—Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt, their work changes after Pollock. Reinhardt was for and against Pollock—he couldn't just be for or he would be derivative, so he had to also be against. I think that the “for and against” model has existed in painting ever since. There are painters who think Pollock was the end of painting and what do you do after, and others who believe that everybody who promotes Pollock is a fool and that really painting is ongoing from another tradition. Those views can be seen as somewhat reactionary. Then there are the people both for and against, and those are the ones I am interested in. How are they for him and how are they against him? Because Pollock's project, if it's the death of painting, says everything is dealt with and closed. I think the people who are interesting are those who believe that Pollock dealt with this but didn't deal with that, and that his project is still open. That's one way I am interested in painting, but it's not the only way.

I think it's Wallace Stevens who says the challenge is to live in the world without preconceptions of the world. How do you keep yourself open to experience rather than falling back on your judgments? I remember John

Ashbery talking about a Herzog movie—he was recounting it, and said, “Well, in the scene two men are drinking and one kills the other and then later they are dancing and one of them is dead.” And he laughed and said, “I’ve never seen that in a movie before.” And I remember Robert Kelly talking about Jackson Mac Low—I think that Jackson read at Bard while I was a student, and Kelly said of his work, “It’s not like any other.” How do you go to a John Cage concert if you have a lot of judgments about what music is supposed to be! [Mutual laughter.] You have to leave all judgment at the door. Of course it gets you into trouble sometimes—you go to things and think, “Oh, I really didn’t like that.” But like or dislike is not the point. That is what I meant about stamina: whatever you think, you have to be there for the whole six hours, ride the roller coaster of emotion and understand that judgment is beside the point—experience, that is the point. The first time I saw John Cage was at the Poetry Project, and he read in that quiet voice of his. And it was in the main part of the church—there were quite a few people there. But you could hear a guitar down the street, sirens going by. This was in the seventies. Somebody stood up and yelled, “This is all fucking bourgeois bullshit!” and left. Cage was unruffled through this whole thing, which amazed me. Afterwards people asked about the person who yelled, and Cage told the story of a man who had come to hear him, I believe it was in Los Angeles. He hated the piece, walked out, and was driving home, gets the car in his garage and he’s been thinking about the piece all along and he changes his mind in some way and he backs the car up and goes back to the concert. And he gets there just as it’s over. He feels so guilty about this that he goes up to Cage and apologizes for leaving. And Cage says, “Oh no no no—that was part of the concert.”

The experience is never limited to the concert hall, the picture frame, the context of the museum.

Exactly. What do you take home with you, what do you carry out the door

with you that allows you to experience it years later when you think about it? But the primary is necessary: you have to go see it, and you have to try and see it without preconceptions. I have probably looked at some paintings twenty times before I actually began to see them—I had to see through all the ways I knew or had been taught or had learned or adapted just out of the habit of seeing. I think that with Johns, to go to my preoccupation—I came to New York in 1975, and saw his retrospective at the Whitney. I didn't understand Johns at all, so I kept going back and back—I probably went half a dozen times to the show. I also read everything I could about Johns, and only Leo Steinberg helped me see his paintings. And I thought, "Is my experience that wrong?" Almost none of what I read corresponded to my experience in any way. I set out to figure out what my experience of Johns was because literally I didn't really understand it. And I didn't understand why I had to keep going back. Even now that I do think I see his paintings more clearly than I did before, I still go back to see them again. I probably looked at the flag painting seventy-five times before I began to see what was literally right in front of me.

So that's what you mean about your interest in artists who instruct you in how to see? That Johns is one of those people who really helped your process of seeing, how to take those veils of theory, or those assumptions about culture, away from you?

Absolutely. Because the thing is, lots of critics and art historians keep saying that Johns is hermetic, that he is hiding something. Why would an artist hide something? That thinking infantilizes the artist, like he's been a bad boy or bad girl. He's hiding something—that seems so wrong. I think one is hermetic out of necessity, not out of the desire to be hermetic. So what is the necessity? Nobody that I have read can explain that to me. They are saying he is hermetic but they aren't saying what the necessity of that hermeticism is. And why is hermetic bad? Just to go back to the poetry world, in poetry transparency is seen as bad, opacity

and hermeticism are good, at least in the little part of the poetry world that I care about. In the art world, the privileging of Warhol over Johns illustrates that transparency is good and hermeticism is bad. I come at it from a different angle. Just in that sense, a) what's so interesting about transparency? and b), which is partly why I wrote about Warhol; I don't believe he's that transparent—I think there's a lot of stuff that just doesn't get discussed. Transparency is a way of not seeing Warhol's work, but believing in your idea of it. You know, supposedly the reason that he did the Coca-Cola painting is because both Queen Elizabeth and he drank Coca-Cola. Everybody says, "Oh, see how universal he is." The fact is in 1962 in America, if you were black you could drink Coca-Cola, but you couldn't drink it anywhere and everywhere. So there is a way that the transparency reading bypasses segregation and segregationist policies that were still in existence in America when Warhol did the painting.

That belief that the advertising in Warhol is always somehow neutral, or purely celebratory, when actually the product is inflected by context at the outset.

Right. It's a way to believe in a version of art history and say he's important at the same time. My reading of the race riot paintings is completely different from other people. There is one image that I think is very telling. There is clearly some kind of march going on. On one side of the street the blacks are looking down the street, and they are looking down and to the right. On the side of the street which we, the viewer, are standing on, there are a policeman and police dog guarding or protecting us from crossing the street or having the other side cross to the side where we are. And in the middle there is a black man being bitten on the ass by a police dog. Really, you can take that image and say it's a parade, and the parade is being led by a clown.

So it's a minstrel show.

Right, and the painting is really about a fear of change. Why is it that Warhol picks Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, and Natalie Wood? Natalie Wood is the girlfriend of the gang leader in *West Side Story*—her boyfriend is murdered, and that starts the war between the Jets and the Sharks. Marilyn Monroe was with men who died or whose lives got ruined or altered after she leaves them. And Elizabeth Taylor's husband Michael Todd had died. They were all true femmes fatales. Also, Jackie Kennedy . . . it was fatal to be near them. The other interesting thing is, why do certain of those paintings become more promoted in culture than others?

Why does one become iconic?

Right—why do the Marilyn and Elizabeth and Jackie paintings become iconic when the Natalie Wood painting is not seen that way? The culture is revealing its own belief in the femme fatale. It is really continuing an old, old myth. So as modern as Andy is, there is something old-fashioned and, I suppose, comforting to those who believe in those ideals. Why not have this as part of the discussion? It doesn't make him less interesting as an artist; in fact, it makes him equally as fascinating as any other reading applied to him. I think he is a completely fascinating figure, both for the fact of what he did and for our own fascination with him.

For instance, the painting *Self Portrait with Camouflage*. I read it as a classic American dilemma: I want to fit in, i.e., the camouflage, and I want to be noticed at the same time. I want to be an individual, but I don't want to be eccentric or weird or that different. I think *that* painting is very telling, to have combined his portrait with a camouflage pattern. After all, he wore a wig and was instantly recognizable. It is not like he had a look that no one would notice. He developed a look that everyone would notice.

He became his own icon.

Exactly. It was like Richard Brautigan saying, “I don’t like people noticing me on the street,” but then dressing exactly like he appeared in his author’s photograph so that if you had any familiarity with his book, of course you would recognize him. It’s not like he went out in disguise. Even I, who barely knew his work, would have recognized him.

Was your decision to write The United States of Jasper Johns somewhat of a corrective, then, revising this notion of his enigmatic status?

The impulse was just to write down what I saw in his work so that I could sense it for myself. And my feeling now is that I want to write another book, because that one didn’t see his work clearly enough. I feel like I am still learning how to see him, and that has been really challenging and interesting to me. Even as I think his own work, his latest work, makes you resee something about his earlier work. In one painting called *After Henri Monnier* he’s included an image he saw, I believe in *the London Times*, of a young man looking through a screen behind which a couple is having sex. The man casts a shadow on the screen, and you can see that the shadow has an erection. Here you are looking at this wall of encaustic that doesn’t open—you are looking straight at it. Within that painting is an image of a man looking through the screen and seeing sex or birth or whatever you want to call it on the other side. And there’s this string in front, the catenary, the threshold . . . is the painting about how you look at your own mortality, what’s on the other side? Is it possibly about beginnings and endings and how we all live between them? Is it about reflecting upon yourself looking at beginnings and endings?

For a 75-year-old painter, that seems pretty apt.

Yeah, and I think what's hermetic about it is just flat-out human, and something we all understand. We have all dreamed about, thought about, pondered our own mortality, our own unavoidable absence. Is that hermetic? And if that is what one of Johns' paintings could possibly be about, then maybe it's connected to the other paintings. You could start there and think, well what's this show about his work? So when critics called it hermetic and dismissed it, I thought, how could they not see what's in front of them? That thought prompted me to write about the show, and I now want to go back to the beginning, to his first *Flag*, and work my way up to the *Catenary* paintings because I am convinced that they are all connected and that I will see the connection if I look carefully and openly enough.

We're back to presence, or something perhaps that the art world is not willing to entertain: vulnerability, unless it becomes ironic or satiric or erotic. I suppose this goes back to how Johns has continued to teach you how to see. Just hearing you talk shows me how. Would you say there is a poet who has a similar dimension in your sense of relationship to how to see language?

I think John Ashbery would be one poet who has done that (there are others). The thing that both Ashbery and Johns have in common—or share, let's put it that way—is that they both made history and they try not to repeat themselves, or by nature they never settled in a style. Warhol made history, but then it became a style; Lichtenstein made history, but then it became a style. Robert Ryman made history and it never became a style. He works within certain so-called parameters, but they are the parameters of experience. Johns made history and it never became a style. And I think Ashbery made history and it really never became a style. He continues to write in different ways.

Your own work is so various in that way too—I could see that being a model. Is that something you consciously have tried to do in your own work? To not

repeat yourself, or to find new methods or strategies of investigation?

Yes. I remember when I took creative writing classes with Ashbery and I showed him these different works. I said, "I sometimes feel like there is something wrong because I feel like I become different people when I write these things. They don't add up." And he said, "Oh, you just get bored easily. That's a good thing." It's great the way he gave me different permissions.

I think it's interesting that you've talked about how difficult it is to write about art you feel passionately about without becoming dogmatic, or ossified, or overly attached to a master narrative of some sort, or even to individual artists. I think it's neatly condensed by the epigraph for your essay "The Poet as Art Critic," in the words of Yve-Alain Bois: "The coordinates of any position stands for and against" and "any critical discourse is programmatic in part." I am wondering how you manage, then, to write passionately for and against without becoming overly programmatic.

Probably because I have no guiding paradigm. I try to keep the language located in experience, rather than locating the work in a narrative. Yve-Alain Bois writes about the history of postwar painting as painting mourning its own death but resisting its demise. Within that paradigm he is someone who looks very carefully and very passionately at painting. He talks about growing up in France when Jean-Paul Sartre's criticism was published, and how pristine or pompous that kind of writing sometimes could be. Greenberg's writing was a refreshing model for him because it was so clear and it offered a paradigm to define how he and other younger people from that moment were influenced by art. At the same time he always tries to work within the level of experience even though he is using a model. I think he is really good . . . I just don't have a model. In that essay I mention how Hal Foster complains about poets not having a paradigm. And Robert Kelly said to me, "Oh, I have a paradigm, I just can't fit it in

through the door.”

[Laughter.] That’s also an insulting and ill-informed sense of what contemporary poetry is about, as if it is still just running on instincts or there is no real theoretical argument going on. Clearly, one can’t write an earnest, confessional first-person verse now and think it’s fresh, or be taken seriously in the poetry world—it doesn’t take a paradigm to figure that out. It’s interesting to me that you can move into the art world, but the art world is not necessarily interested in moving into poetry.

No, it’s not—most critics and art historians are hardly up on what is happening in poetry. The argument about the necessity of poetics and how essential that is to the practice of poetry is not really understood. I mean, you are always seen in a poem as standing for and against something. I think that’s something most art historians (and obviously I’m generalizing here) haven’t exhibited signs of knowing. And I think most poets would agree with me that the writing of each and every poem is a standing for and against something. That’s one thing about being a poet and writing about art that I understand.

I find that lack of mutuality rather stunning. It elides the fact that much of what contemporary poets are writing about is informed by the very same theory that makes pronouncements on the death of painting or the death of the author. I mean, Blanchot, Deleuze, deconstruction, desubjectivization, all of this “nonce” language . . . it’s very much in contemporary post-Language poetry. It’s an incredibly sophisticated address just to say “I” with any awareness, and that presumes the same philosophical attention one would think a painter or sculptor would be thinking of—the same kind of intensity or the same kind of involvement. There’s more than a bit of an irony in the dismissal of poets as these “romantic souls” struggling to make art in the postromantic moment.

Right, right. I think art historians assume—and now I am going to

generalize again—that contemporary painters haven’t figured out that the postromantic moment is gone. I think they’re wrong—many painters are quite clear about it. There are certainly painters I know who have read as deeply and as widely as any other reader I’ve met. Nozkowski seems to me incredibly well-read. Tom and I happened to be in Maine at the same time and he was reading a book about the Thirty Years’ War, and I thought, What doesn’t this person read? In some conversation he was talking about Samuel Beckett. I think David Reed has certainly read Deleuze. Or the painter Linda Besemer—she has read all sorts of theory because she wanted to figure out how to make a painting in a postfeminist world. It is really interesting that these painters are influenced by that, but they are painting. They still believe that painting is both possible and open. I became very interested in them as artists and their work and I have written about all three of them.

That gets at how one works out these arguments in experimentation, in process, which again is so true in your own poetry. There are the early prose poems, sudden fictions, serial poems, villanelles, personal lyrics, longer fictions . . . what is behind this formal restlessness?

Probably that I am interested in reading all different kinds of things: detective novels, fiction, art history, criticism, theory, essays. I think I learned a lot when I was young from different European writers—the ones I read wrote in all different sorts of ways. Before I became aware of that in American writing I was aware of it in French writing—say, in unclassifiable books by Ponge. Manny Farber wrote a piece called “White Elephant Art vs. Termite Art” in which he talked about being bound to a tradition: basically you are making white elephant art, and termite art is eating what is in front of you and breaking the bounds all the time. I read that essay fairly early on. It informed my way of looking at art, and my way of writing. But I also wanted to write in different ways. I think every form narrows what you can do, it sets the parameters. So if you keep

changing the parameters, perhaps you can bring something unexpected into play. Robert Kelly once alluded to what Ralph Waldo Emerson said at the end of some poem: write everything. I was a student at Bard and I thought, well I have to understand what everything means to me, but I am willing to deal with that challenge. I think his notion of “write everything” influenced me a lot.

Emerson says, too, in “The Poet”: “There is no doctrine of forms in our philosophy.”

Which is a great remark. Then he says that thing about Milton being too literary and Homer being too historical, and he calls for the American poet that doesn’t yet exist. He clearly loves Milton and Homer and yet makes this amazingly confident statement. Of course, the poet who comes along is Whitman. I have my graduate art students read Whitman. They are going to read all nineteenth-century stuff this semester to understand how the present comes out of that. I want to introduce them to an alternative to the currently fashionable academic theories.

What is their reception to Whitman or poetry in general?

Generally they are nervous about it because they feel like they don’t know how to read it. The teaching of poetry in America is the teaching of outworn or outmoded conventions, for the most part. I am interested in presenting them with the idea that you can’t read paintings simply according to one model. And you can’t read poetry that way. You can’t read Joyce the same way as you read Beckett; in fact, it takes a different kind of learning how to read. So you learn to read experientially in different ways. I get them to read closely, and introduce them to different readings of the same piece. If they acknowledge that reading can be learned without subscribing to a specific model, that perhaps can help their own practice in art because the same is true. They can create their own model

and have it be open—this is what many poets and artists have done. We have to learn how to read them. Just to go back to Johns: I don't think he is trying to make it impossible for me to learn how to read him; I think he is trying to make it possible for me to learn how to read him. And not for me, but for himself—he is trying to learn how to read the world from his experience. He is not trying to hide it, he is trying to understand it. However that understanding manifests itself he has some faith and some hope that it's transmittable. He is kind of famous for that, but I think it is actually an implicit act of faith. He just doesn't tell us how to read his work—we have to learn, which develops a kind of trust between an “I” and a “you.” Each work is a reading attempt, a reading, but not the final or end-all reading. He says, you could see this, read it, understand it. It doesn't make me smarter than you or more this or more that. This is just who I am and what I am doing.

Do your students know your identity as a poet when they are coming into your class? Is that something conscious in the classroom: that you talk about art from the point of view of a poet?

I don't think most or many do—they learn it over the time they study with me. Recently I got a job at Rutgers teaching in the art department, and I gave a reading at the Poetry Project in New York. Many students came out of curiosity and interest. I think they sensed something else about me after this happened because they saw another manifestation of how I exist in public.

It is a bit of a paradox for your career, considering your visibility in the poetry world. I wonder how the art world perceives you—do they ever perceive you as a poet?

Some, but not generally. I don't know . . . I think artists perceive me as a poet. On some level these people are reading me, but the art world per se

as the establishment? Let's put it this way: I was stunned to discover that the museum catalogue of the recent MOMA Pollock retrospective did not have a single citation of Frank O'Hara, despite the fact that O'Hara had been asked to do the first Pollock retrospective. I couldn't believe that nothing O'Hara had written about Pollock could be of any use to someone thirty years later! Just to fill out the story: Brice Marden, who has been preoccupied with Pollock's work since he was a student, said to me one day, "I just reread this thing that O'Hara wrote about Pollock and it was really beautiful and it made so much sense." So here is this painter reading something O'Hara—a great, amazing, interesting poet—wrote on Pollock probably thirty years ago, and he is getting something out of it. Just to test it, I compared some of the citations to O'Hara's writings—sometimes he anticipated what was said by ten years. But the art historians or curators of that show . . . not a single O'Hara citation. If something can be depressing, that was depressing.

Baudelaire writes, "All great poets naturally and fatally become critics. I pity those poets who are guided by instinct alone and regard them as incomplete. But in the spiritual life of the former, that is the great poets, the crisis inevitably occurs when they feel the need to reason about their art, to discover the obscure laws and virtue of which they have created and to extract from the study a set of precepts whose divine aim is infallibility and poetic creation. It would be unthinkable for a critic to become a poet and it is impossible for a poet not to contain within a critic. Therefore the reader will not be surprised with my regarding the poet as the best of all critics." In occupying two worlds as long as you have, I wonder if that has been at all true for you: that your work in art criticism informs but also destabilizes your relationship to poetry.

I think that is true. I am interested in poems that are destabilized on some level because I don't believe in a stability—it is an illusion. But at the same time it may be a manifestation of my own anxiety to read myself therapeutically, as if I were my own psychiatrist. Maybe it is just the mani-

festation of an anxiety that I will never resolve . . . or maybe I chose not to resolve it and to stay in that state of anxiety because somehow resolving it would close me up, would close me to experience. But there is a crisis in my writing about art . . . it's the Borges problem: if you write about A then you are not writing about B. "The Garden of Forking Paths" seems to me the perfect allegory for the art critic! [Mutual laughter.] Somehow you are just wandering around in the labyrinth and the labyrinth keeps changing and growing and extending because time keeps passing and the path keeps moving along and you are on it. Whatever path you are on you know right away if you have thought about it for even half a minute; there are at least fifty other paths you are conscious of, not to mention all the ones you are not conscious of or are not even aware exist. There is a humbling side to being a critic: no matter who you write about and how much you write or how many people you write about and how full your argument is, there is so much you didn't write about.

The possibility of exploring other paths brings up another question: what attracts you about working in other mediums with other artists? And how did that get started?

Initially it started out as a lark. The first collaboration I did was with Archie Rand. We were teaching at Bard and I said to him, "Oh, let's collaborate." And he said, "Alright, let's do a thousand watercolors." That was mind-boggling. He had a great follow-up: "Only by doing a thousand will we get beyond what we know how to do." It freed me from that self-conscious moment of paralysis, at not knowing what to put down on a piece of paper. He made me confront it over and over because he was just spinning out the watercolors. I thought, wait a second, how did that happen? It got me thinking differently, and I would say that my writing changed after that: I started to think about how each line or each set of words, whatever I put on the paper, had to tell everything that it could tell within what it was. There was nothing else to fall back on, nothing before or nothing after.

You could imply what came before the line or what comes after, but you had to tell or suggest something—it had to be there and had to be as fast and as visceral as the visual image it was responding to, or inspiring. We went back and forth: I would write something and just hand it to him and he would do the watercolor, or he would do the watercolor and hand it to me and I would write something on it

There was never any priority of one coming before the other?

No. He and I worked together at the same time at the same table. It became slightly competitive: can I write faster than he can paint, or can he paint faster than I can write. But after a while you are not in that way of thinking, you are in some other state. It is almost like being in a trance—I know no other way to really describe it. You are quickly sorting through and thinking about how the words function, what they are depending on. You are trying to get through as many things as possible to see what happens. So we went through “A is for . . .”, “B is for . . .”—all those kind of children’s primers. We did fake novel covers, fake movies. We did all sorts of the visual things that exist, then after a while I didn’t know what I was writing.

So the genre categories that this collaboration originated from began to break down as you became less aware of the process?

Yes, and that became really useful to think about as a poet. Where do you begin? Where does the line begin? Where does the poem begin? Suddenly you just thought, What are you saying? How do you say it? And then you are just writing. You have left the room, so to speak.

In terms of immediacy, since you are obviously dealing with a visual medium, do you think that the collaboration heightened the image load of language in your response? You were dealing with two problems: a response to an image,

but also the compression of this limited space and limited format, not to mention limited time.

Yeah, I think it probably did, in a postimage way. So that the image you are suggesting in words is not instantly picturesque. In one piece I said something like, “Now we’ll do the blast furnace stomp,” suggesting a dance . . . but what would that dance look like? You can’t really come up with a term. And you become aware, just like a visual artist is aware, of the thing-word “blast,” “furnace” and “stomp” as jammed together. I became aware of the line as one word right next to the other. That made me break it down and think about the line itself. Also, if you put part of the line at the top of the page and part at the bottom, and the image is the middle, what happens between the top and the bottom? I became aware of all of these things out of necessity that I might not have otherwise thought of because the form of the piece of paper demanded it. I mean, how many words can you actually get on a piece of paper in that format, because the words have to be big enough to be read almost simultaneously with the image? So you couldn’t write tiny script because instantly the reader would change focus. I had to keep the language at a certain size.

That seems to suggest a structuring of language less along the lines of hierarchy and more in apposition. So it leads to metonymic linkages, constantly looking at how things are next to each other and discovering relationships you wouldn’t have thought of in a more narrative context in which you have more space to develop an idea. The idea has to simply be presented or discovered.

Yeah, and some of the writing felt like I was moving through water—it was word by word. I would put one word down and wouldn’t want the next word to be obvious—like, say, “the car” and then “drive,” blah, blah, blah. Well what would be the verb? So I would just be thinking in noun-verb sequences and wondering, how do I break this? Like Creeley’s

breaking your own habits thing. I was also aware not to become so self-conscious that I couldn't move. It was an interesting state of anxiety, but at least I produced and defined this state of anxiety in which to be anxious! And also just to write so much you almost didn't remember what you said before because the moment you finished one piece of paper you couldn't go back to it—there is this guy handing you another one. Whatever trick you used to become aware before, you don't want to use that again. You kind of wear yourself out. You know, Archie is deeply knowledgeable about jazz and he was also introducing me to that process.

Your work with Archie is decidedly procedural. Did it affect your own projects outside of collaboration, in which you got more interested in procedural verse, Oulipian machines and such?

I was always interested in procedures, but didn't want to tie my boat to that alone as a realm. I realized in doing works, say with Archie, that you could tie yourself to procedures, but they didn't have to be mechanically defined.

That they could change, were in process? That there wasn't an absolute limit to these things? Or, to flip it, that the limit was inevitable, as in Olson's decree that "limits are what we are all inside of."

Exactly, and an Oulipian would say that the writer is the rat inside the maze who eats his way out of that maze. All of that is parallel to each other. Olson understands limit one way and Georges Perec understands it in another way. And I think, say, Pollock understood limit in another way. They are different, but they have certain affinities. Maybe my own restlessness with form comes out of understanding that each form is by nature a limit, and I want to see what I can do within that limit, but not to be contained within that one container, to choose other containers

to move through or exist within in an attempt to come up with my own container.

Should we stop here, until we begin again?

from FREE MAIL

Solmaz Sharif

Dear S,

My GUARD's up and kept my fridge
down to single servings. It takes two glasses
of red to be my IN-COMPANY.

How are my REPLACEMENTS?

Don't tell me. I like this little SHELTER
I've built—drywall SHIELDING a room
of salt and pepper shakers I've bought
from souvenir shops along the 10.

If you wish a picture:

the MAP in my dashboard
is outdated and missing
two states, my left arm browned
from hanging out the car window,
my right at noon, fingers drumming,
a flat highway cutting through
fields and fields and fields and
FIRES moving down the hills.

::

Dear S,

My DUMMY, my DUMP,
FENDER and FIREBALL, where are you?
It's too LATE to remember
what I meant to write. In the fifties,

people carried cards with conversation topics
appropriate between those fallout shelters
and for coloreds signs. I steer through hills
of windmills and an AIRFIELD
of BOMBERS, pigeon nests gathering
in the quiet engines.

::

Dear S,

The purpose of this letter
is to inform you I have received
word you felt it a good idea
to put your recent friend
in contact with my best.
Please clarify the expected result
of such an interaction. Enclosed,
please find a smashed disco ball
to scatter by your bed. Hope
this letter finds you still
an insomniac.

::

Dear S,

ANTITERRORISM experts are talking
about us again. Some news anchor
cussing during commercials.
I saw your wanted ad at the subway station.
I saw a young Taliban

but couldn't see past his beauty,
brows of an ancient relief, to the tank
he was riding on.

CONTAMINATED REMAINS

wash hands before getting in bed
leave interrogation room before
answering cell
teach your mouth to say
honey when you enter the kitchen

DAMAGE AREA

does not include night sweats
or retching at the smell of barbecue

DEAD SPACE

fridges full
after the explosion the hospital
places body parts
out back where crowds
attempt to identify those
who do not answer their calls
by an eyeball
a sleeve of a favorite shirt
a wristwatch stopped

DESTRUCTION RADIUS

limited to blast site
and not the brother abroad
who answers his phone
then falls against the counter
or punches a cabinet door

earth becomes land: GROUND: DESIRED OR ACTUAL: becomes
GROUND CONTROL: fenced according to ethnic and religious enclaves:
becomes HOMELAND: hides HOMING MINE: SNAGLINE MINE: CREEPING
MINE: FREE MINE: becomes MINE: barricaded into CONTROLLED PASSING:
ambulance flaring red onto cement blocks: becomes FIELD OF FIRE: end of
TRAJECTORY: crater where once stood minaret: stood bookseller: where
we send all we wish to bury: BOUQUET MINES: plywood boxes hammered
hours earlier: from soil horizons six feet down you can discern the local
climate: you can figure out what will grow here

ARMY OF ANOTHER

Nance Van Winckel

Oh Little Wisdom,
something will find you, some nose, cold,
some sound, bark, some cough, some *hush now*,
some pain gone forth to meet the place
yours was, some vine cut from the gut,
some Juned-up sun, some tread, some mite.

NIGHT JOURNEY

Suzanne Gardinier

for Mahmoud Darwish

Pero yo ya no soy yo
ni mi casa es ya mi casa.

Federico García Lorca,
"Romance Sonámbulo"

I

The mystery of the lost voice returned in the night/to sharpen and
soothe the wound of absence
The mystery of music behind your closed eyes/opening another
listening
The mystery of your hand in mine/in a crowded downstairs restaurant
in Ramallah
Of your hand in mine still Draft of a translation/Do I dream or do I
walk with you

Your intransigent body from the Galilee/to the armored helicopter for
the ceremonies
Making soldiers touch yellow roses/to lift and carry you
From your last bed On the empire's border/where you heard the Native
ghosts whispering
Your heart broken for the last time in August/The day of your death
was a hot bright day

And today gray in Manhattan midwinter/when I walked in the library
of the letters you learned

In your first prison Letters saved/from annihilation by sumoud like
yours
Letters dancing in the names of children/born and born after the failed
attempt
At ashes Letters walking like the woman with a scarf/around her
Native face on the train

Hebrew letters In which Hikmet told you/about the things he didn't
know he loved
In which Neruda found under the known city/the lost city of the labor
of slaves
A letter from a Warsaw fighter in Yiddish/The letters in the names of
the soldiers today
Attempting ashes And the numbers/Seven hundred and sixty-five dead
Thirteen days

*Blood and blood and blood you wrote/Blood in your country In my name
and yours
In the baby's milk In light and shadow/In the grain of wheat In salt
In a poem to your intransigent comrade/lost After you walked in
Manhattan
That letters will tell the truth you insisted/That life on this earth is
possible*

Yarok Yarok you read in the prison/Green Green How I love you green
The glint of it in Galilean olives/The glint of it in your lover's mouth
In your lover's mouth Akhdar The land of my poem/is green The
captain's mouth sweetened by the words
You put there as he spoke to the world Across town/Do not let the green
branch fall from my hands

On your last night on this earth did you dream/of horses The one tied
to a mulberry tree

Before your father's place became/a place he watched with his head in
his hands

The one you found wet in an almond grove/who'd forgotten her
nationality

The one with letters tangled in her mane/who carried you to the seven
gates

The first where you sat with a free woman laughing/Drinking coffee
and milk Pomegranate juice Rain

The second whose bright made you close your eyes/The outdoor
laundry of transformations

Bright salt cove and rocks and the word Mine/rinsed of its significance

Flags and bandages Isn't every flag a bandage/Bleached white
Rebecoming starstuff in the sun

And before the third The gate of music/Did you turn for one last look
at the earth

To say goodbye to letters To the poems/written on cigarette boxes in
jails

To bread To green To the alchemies/of the oud Making its human
translations

Misery to beauty Dream to awakening/Sorrow to rapture Branch to
song

Did you see the Gaza mothers weeping/over the ruined traces of their
encampments

The way you saw the mothers of Shatila/Of every ghetto camp assailed

Did you see the victims and the executioners/through the chaos of their
mask exchanges

The way you saw through the lie of revenge/A flag over a wound that
does not heal

Did you have to show your documents/Your shyness Your refusal to
hate

Your way of seeing a free woman's body/as a sign of a just world
Your remembering Your recalcitrance/Your affliction with the illness
of hope

Your way of touching orphans with your eyes/the color of the Gaza
dawn sea

Did you see the wheel of slaughter turning/in its mute expressive
repetitions

Did you see those whose way will be the earth's way/when the time of
slaughter is done

Did you see letters Scattered in patterns/like stars Extinguished
Radiant Persistent

Forming the gift of words like yours/*Another day will come A womanly
day*

3

Night now and the park lilacs hidden/without the revelation of
blossom

The morning glories a tangle of old vine/clumped on the meadow's
chainlink fence

Glistening with ice in the streetlight/The lacy feather filaments
And the stripped lilac branches suggesting fragrance/by way of
whispers to sharp ears like yours

As you were suggested that August day not/by the soldiers adjusting
your roses on the bier

But by the boys playing hide and seek/under the rippling flag

Not by the president reciting/someone else's words from a music stand
But by the women who pressed close to touch you/Your lovers who
wrote your words on their shirts

And you asked Who has spilled and taken what you gathered/And
they said We can't recognize his face
And you said In whose ways have you kept steadfast/And they blushed
and turned away
What are letters in a time of annihilation/you asked from the masjid of
a human body
Carried to the gates Are you still there Turned/Waiting for us to
answer you

The morning glories' black tendrils keep/the shape of their turn against
the sun
Along the icy cinder path scattered/with cigarette butts and seeds
The seeds the Aztecs used to see the gates/To be translated into the
vines
That will hold the furred blue trumpets of summer/one morning before
they let them fall

The traces not wholly obliterated/as your Imru al-Qais would say
For when the south wind blows sand over them/the north wind sweeps
it away
And another homeless man whispering/Still pacing the divided
besieging city
Says in letters you knew *Behold/I am doing a new thing do you not
perceive it*

In Gaza it's tomorrow Is the girl still there/who put a strawberry in my
hand

From the one field not razed She and her brothers/who knew your
letters by heart
Dancing with you in the mystery of healing/Someone here tonight is
attempting it
A homeless man Thinking he's talking to no one/Blessing people he
can't see and singing

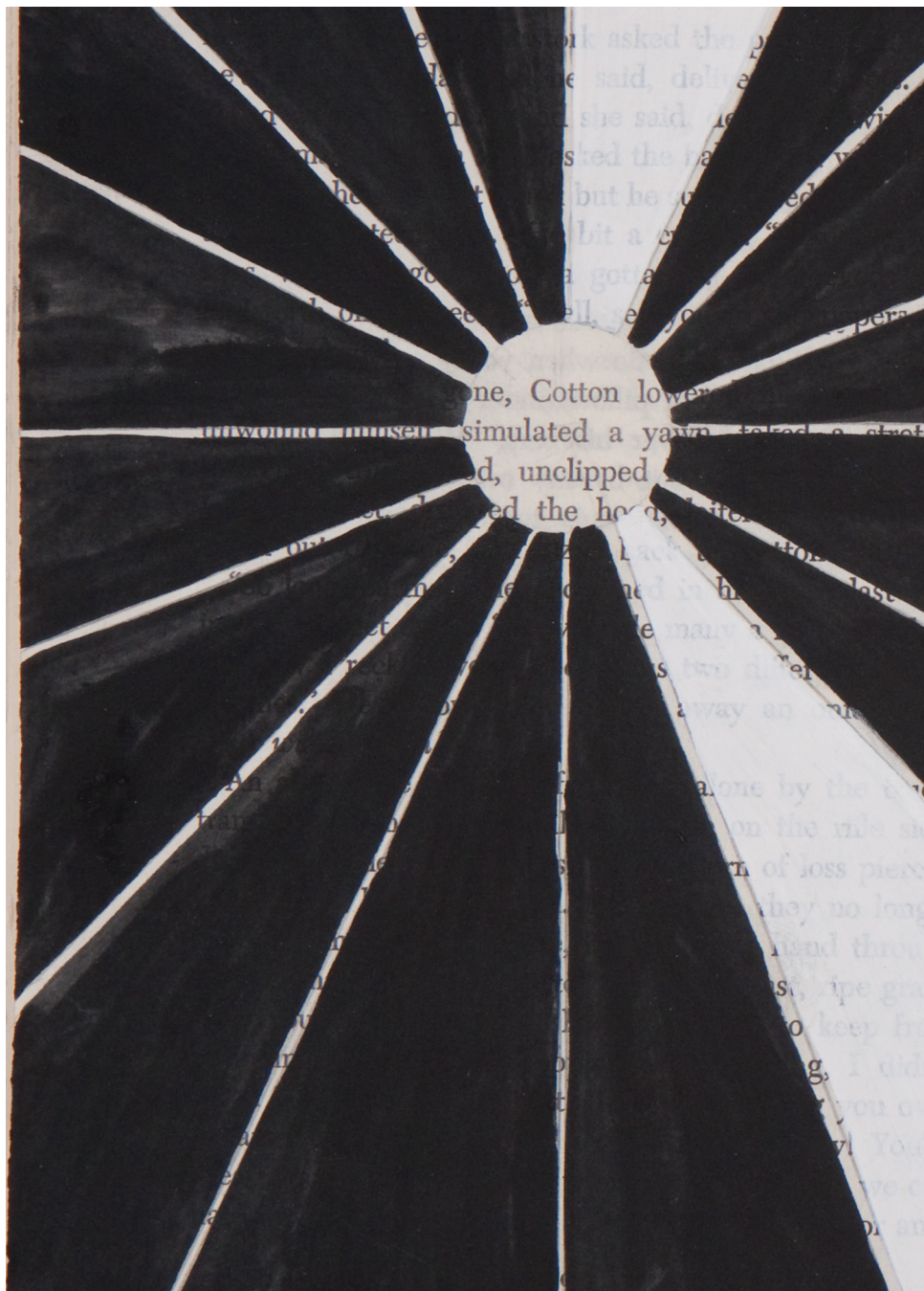
from VILLAGE CARVED FROM AN ELEPHANT'S TUSK

Paul Fattaruso

She approaches the mirror as though she were visiting a prisoner. Examines her hard prisoner's features through the glass—the cheekbones of the prisoner. The unquestioning eyes. She touches the glass. The prisoner touches the inside of the glass. *How much longer*, the prisoner seems to ask, and soon she is crying, real tears. Again & again the prisoner opens and closes her mouth. No sound.

Even far
from the
pond I
hear the
toads arguing
at twilight.

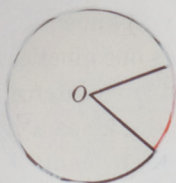
Is it
love? We
know that
there is
a jewel
in the
toad's skull,
we know
that this
jewel has
the power
to detect
poison, but
we do
not know
the jewel's
color, nor
how very
small the
jewel is.





PLANE GEOMETRY

317. Theorem. In a circle or in equal circles, arcs having the same number of arc degrees are equal.



SUGGESTIONS. $AB \cong A'B'$. Why? $\angle C$ and $\angle C'$ are central angles of equal circles. $\therefore \angle C \cong \angle C'$ and $AC \cong A'C'$.

1. If two arcs of a circle are equal, are the central angles equal?
2. If two arcs of unequal circles, contain the same number of arc degrees, are the central angles equal?
3. Is it possible for two circles to have the same center, in common points in common? Show points in common.
4. If a chord is equal to the radius of a circle, how many degrees is its central angle?
5. Are the radii of a circle equal?

its

2.
8.
9.

number of the

10. What is

11. How many

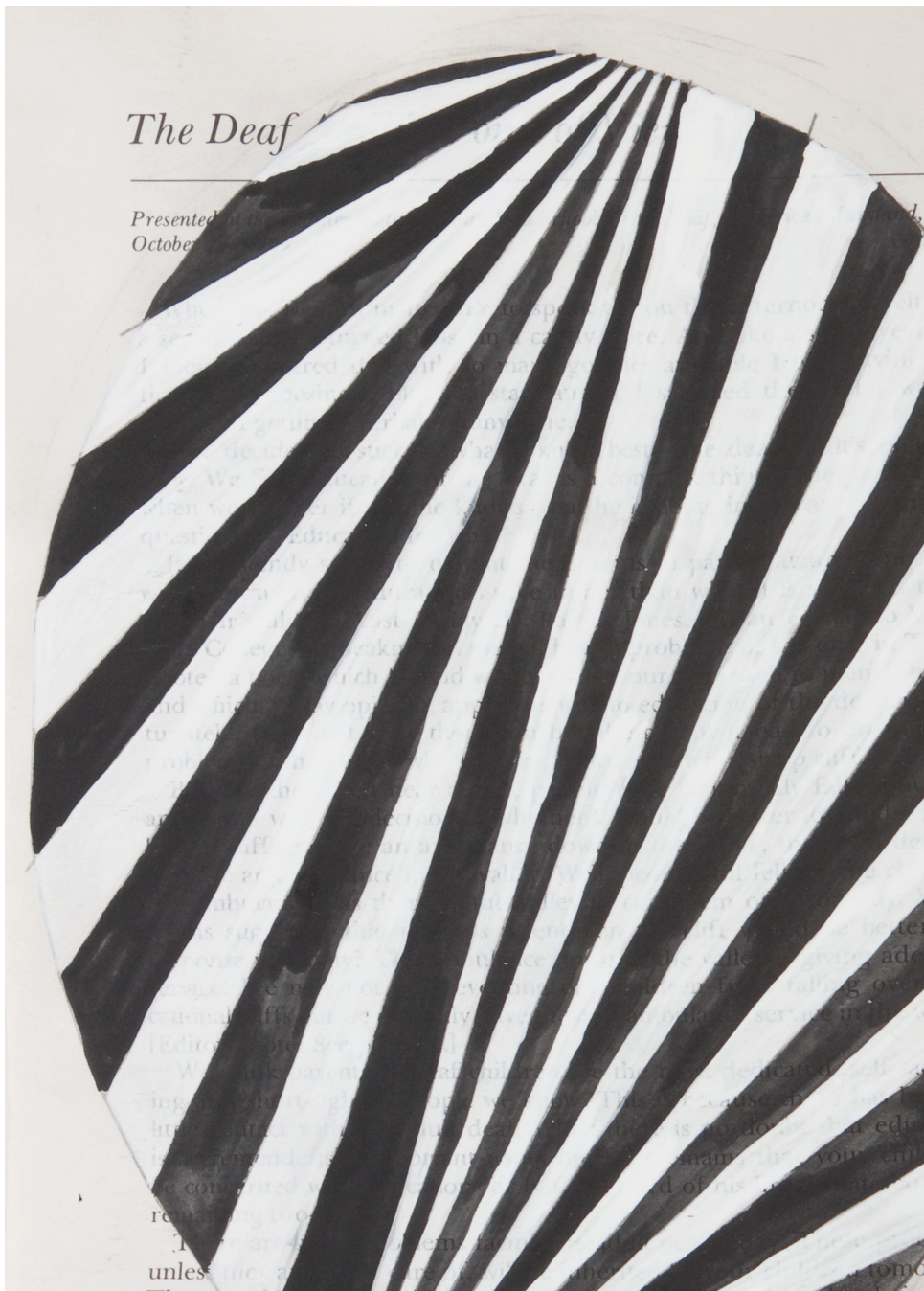
12. Does





The Deaf

Presented
October



deafness is no respecter of persons; all these professions can be fulfilled by the parents, who can, if they will, do wonders in easing the sure, their children must eventually face. To do this, one must know the problems are and to know the problems, one must know us.

I do not want to discuss these problems now, but would love to return up later, if time and interest permits.

To get back in education—last year a superintendent of a midwestern school for the deaf wrote an article entitled, "Dear Education—An Educational Miracle." In this article the Superintendent defends the achievement of deaf school leavers as being an educational miracle. He contended that to expect more from education was asking too much; funny thing is—I agree with him, insofar as the topic goes. It is true, a miracle that the deaf get any education at all—but not for his reasons.

When a deaf child is born, his parents are advised to toss him into the sea of knowledge and let him sink or swim. The parents are told at once, that because of his handicap he is the equivalent of a one-armed swimmer, so it is likely that the swimming lesson will be hard. They further advised that since the child must eventually compete with swimmers with two arms, it would be necessary to hang a 100-pound weight around his neck, also, so that, if he doesn't drown, then his one arm will be twice as strong and therefore capable of doing the work of two.

This is the true miracle—how the deaf manage to survive and contribute to the world. All the people would have gone under and out of existence and none would have given up.

Recently a report on the use of Chinamen, which referred to it as a crutch and implied that the Chinamen were a crutch would be detrimental to the child. But what was wrong with the crutch? The on-line man used the crutch to take his rightful place in society. He did not come to rely on his one arm to serve an unsistered place of two. The child was required to see to their ears. Why was the deaf child compared to a crutch with one arm?

You have been told that deaf children are permitted to be in the community, but they will not try to be. This is not true. It has been demonstrated that the true deaf child is ridiculed and that children are human. They can do what the majority of the other children do, so they have to try. Every deaf child has a right to be heard, at one time or another. A plaintive, "I am making somebody do it." or those who do not talk. Well, I have a story which may cast some light on the reasons.

When I was seven years old, I had a bad case of the flu. As a result, my doctor put me on a diet for ten days. This diet consisted of tea, and I cannot remember the name of the diet. I was to make matters worse, at the time I was working as a bookkeeper in a small business. I was in a real agony.

ARCHITECTURE ACTS SLOWLY

L. S. Klatt

From under a bridge, a man cries out
in his makeshift; the wings of this man are nicked; the eagle
cannot quarter or harbor. The skyscraper on the fault line
is as curvy as the backbone of a camel; it's painful
for the dromedary to offer its delicious hump. The infinite lies down
in the middle of the city, but, while the abstract wants
to be known as a lover, the concrete can't help
but remain aloft, beautifully
sculptured.

MEANTIME

We cut off hands to attract the shutterbugs; then
the nightingale flew in.

We cut off feet; more nightingales.

We cut off noses to succor our children; thousands
of nightingales serenaded us.

Whomever we sought to maim, the birds
perched on their stumps.

It was as if the night was a night of golden opportunity.

For the nightingales required nothing, & the moon
laid upon us its gold-leaf distinctions.

We were pretty pleased; pretty was as pretty does.

BACK SPIN OF HOPE

Afaa M. Weaver

for Horace Silver

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Whatup with Baby Drake?

No hope in baseball, no hope in baseball

Spare ribs \$1, pork shops free

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Hook a brother up?

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Whatup with Cheese?

No hope in baseball, no hope in baseball

Spare ribs \$1, pork chops free

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Hook a brother up?

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Whatup with Muslimah?

Listen lil brother, the hoop, the hoop . . .

Spare ribs \$1, pork chops free

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Hook a sister up?

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Whatup with you, G?

Wade, wade in the water, swim, child!

Spare ribs \$1, pork chops free

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Hook a sister up?

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Whatup with Miss BayBay?

Hey caine copper, I got the girl . . .

Fried fish sandwich \$1, greens free

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Don't get on my bad side
Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper
Whatup, Smooth?
No hope in baseball, no hope in baseball
Fried fish sandwich \$1, greens free
That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims
Gimme some dap!
Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper
Whatup Peaches?
Shine, shine, who got the wine?
Fried fish sandwich \$1, greens free
That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims
Hook a sister up?
Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper
Whatup with Pookie?
Wade, wade in the water, swim, child!
One pig foot 50 cents, two for a dollar

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Gimme some dap!

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Where Sharanda go at?

No hope in baseball, no hope in baseball

One pig foot 50 cents, two for a dollar

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Handle your business, son

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Where Conscience go at?

Eyeballs, roll em cause you can't shoot em

Corn pudding \$2 a pound tonite

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Dat's tight, dat's tight, crack it!

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Where DayDay go at?

Shootin hoops, shootin dope, shootin . . .

Corn pudding \$2 a pound tonite

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Dat's tight, dat's tight, crack it!

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Whatup with Poo Man?

No hope in baseball, no hope in baseball

10 fried chicken wings for \$3

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Don't get on my bad side . . .

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Whatup with Preach?

Eyeballs, roll em cause you can't shoot em

10 fried chicken wings for \$3

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Don't get on my bad side . . .

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Where Daddy 3T go at?

Shootin hoops, shootin dope, shootin . . .

10 fried chicken wings for \$3

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

You ain't got to steal to keep it real . . .

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Where Big Daddy go at?

No hope in baseball, no hope in baseball

10 fried chicken wings for \$3

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

You ain't got to steal to keep it real

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Where Pookie go with Sharanda?

No hope in baseball, no hope in baseball

2 bowls of gumbo for a dollar

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Poppop sez *study long, study wrong* . . .

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Where Pookie go at with Sharanda?

Shine, shine, who got the wine?

2 bowls of gumbo for a dollar

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Dat's tight, dat's tight, crack it!

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Where Chantay at?

No hope in baseball, no hope in baseball

Who made this gumbo? Hey!

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Slide it on over here to me . . .

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Is that Chantay with Pookie?

Little Pete shootin some hoops today, boy . . .

Frozen Kool Aid popsicles 25 cents

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Slide it on over here to me . . .

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

What Chantay and Pookie doing?

No hope in baseball, no hope in baseball

Catsup sandwich 25 cents, air for free

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Kick it, kick it . . .

Here at the flat cup and empty bubble gum wrapper

Where Chantay's mama go at?

Handle your business, son . . .

Catsup sandwich 25 cents, air for free

That's dope, that's dope, back spins and rims

Tight! Tight! Swing, swing, swing . . .

& don't mean a thing . . .

LATE MAKEUP YEARS AND DECLINE (1979–1983)

Dobby Gibson & Matt Hart

These were the lonelier moments,
some have remarked, the most brittle of all.

Recently demystified documents reveal
that cherry trees were the president's idea.
As were constellations and the present King of France.
What they teach us: The surest way to lose a war
is to never consider losing at all.

The cold zero of dusk freezes
half-light in the canyon. We think we've seen it all.
We're ready for whatever's next.

Preferably something with "all" in it: "all for one
and one for all," "all aboard," "pretty maids milking

all in a row." The sitting ducks line up
to bomb the show. The audience considers them
dinner for fifty. Mission improbable, face first to China.

We bleed silence. We paint the last, black star
over an eye. Never before have we loved

more jealously or been tuned so precisely
to the frequency of smithereens, the clouds

mounting one another, the kindergartners
playing with dice.

SURVEY SAYS

Brett Fletcher Lauer

Cocaine traces were found on 100 percent of paper money tested in Detroit.

Five countries send 99 percent of SPAM.

98 percent of “eco-friendly” consumer products found on supermarket shelves make false or misleading claims.

97 percent of teachers will do whatever it takes to help kids learn.

When using Google, 97 percent of respondents said they found what they were looking for either “every time or most of the time.”

96 percent of Americans believe in God or a Divine Spirit.

Secondhand smoke is found in 94 percent of public places in Latin America.

Location data from mobile phones has indicated that 93 percent of human movement is predictable.

The Pee Dee River at Bucksport, SC, contained the highest percentage of intersex fish (91 percent), with high percentages occurring elsewhere on the Pee Dee too.

88 percent of the nation’s children ages 8 to 18 play video games.

Those who drank two or more soft drinks a week had an 87 percent higher risk of getting pancreatic cancer.

In Dearborn, MI, only 67 to 87 percent of bills tested positive for cocaine.

85 percent of oyster reefs are gone, threatening coastal environments and a favored delicacy.

Nearly 83 percent of adults in the Badger State read a local newspaper each week.

82 percent of consumers “Buy Green,” despite the economy.

When browsing the internet 81 percent of Web users leave an online page if they encounter mid-stream rebuffering.

Psst! Talking about other people makes up about 80 percent of conversation.

Respondents also continue to engage in risky and inappropriate behaviors at the same rate as last year, with 76 percent admitting to driving while texting (DWT), 78 percent admitting to checking messages in the bathroom, and 11 percent admitting to doing so during an “intimate moment.”

73 percent of Web users use their online banking password at other Web sites.

72 percent of consumers are “definitely/probably” interested in having hybrid-electric technology for their next vehicle.

In one city in southwestern Ohio, 71 percent of lost dogs were found, compared to just 53 percent of lost cats.

70 percent of men confess to looking at online porn.

What is Twitter? 69 percent of adults don’t really know.

In the past two decades, federal and state courts have overturned 68 percent of the death sentences they have reviewed because of serious errors in their trials.

65 percent of all US inmates meet medical criteria for substance abuse addiction; only 11 percent receive any treatment.

62 percent of women ages 25 to 44 were married and 8 percent were cohabiting. Among men, the comparable figures were 59 percent and 10 percent.

59 percent of ex-employees admitted that they stole confidential company data including customer information, such as contact lists, from the companies, after they lost their jobs.

Just under 58 percent of ninth graders said they got insufficient sleep.

58 percent of Americans don't wear helmets while cycling.

56 percent of young adults in a new sexual relationship are infected with HPV.

46 percent of adults who don't have broadband access believe the Internet is too dangerous for children.

46 percent of consumers trimmed grocery spending.

43 percent of Americans have less than \$10K for retirement.

43 percent of parents admitted to having done their kids' homework.

Of the 42 percent of people who have tried marijuana at least once, 16

percent had also tried cocaine.

Over the past 25 years, some Antarctic penguin populations have shrunk by 33 percent due to declines in winter sea-ice habitat.

30 percent of women watch Internet porn.

Pitches for drugs and medicines make up about 30 percent of SPAM e-mails.

27 percent of women apply makeup while driving.

26 percent of Americans have no clue what country the United States fought to gain its independence.

25 percent of men reported they take their teddy bear with them when going away on business.

Vogue ad pages rose 24 percent for September.

Messaging, commenting, blogging, sharing, and “liking” now fill up 22 percent of all time spent online each month.

Contrary to fact, 18 percent of Americans believe the sun revolves around the earth.

Unattractive men earned 15 percent less than those deemed attractive, while plain women earned 11 percent less than their prettier counterparts.

11 percent of Americans have contacted government officials in the past year about global warming.

Mortgage/refinancing and “organ enlargement” ranked second and third with 9 percent and 7 percent respectively.

5 percent of people in the UK have been scolded for inappropriate corporate email use.

Only 4 percent of Indian women use the mobile web.

There are over 300,000,000 people living in the United States. Of that population, less than 1 percent claim farming as an occupation (and about 2 percent actually live on farms).

0 percent of people would consider paying for a service like Twitter.

HAIKU (FAILED)

Nick Flynn

The thin thread that hold us here, tethered / or maybe tied, together,
what / do you call it—*telephone? horizon? song?* Listen / to yourself
sing, *We are all god's children* / we are all gods, we walk the earth /
sometimes, two sails inside us sometimes / beating, our bodies the
bottle, a ship inside each / until one day, for no reason, it sails—
hello? / damn phone—until one day it sails / out of sight, until one
day it cuts out of / earshot, bye-bye muttered into your cupped palm,
bye-bye / boat, bye-bye rain—Look / maybe this is the place we've been /
waiting for, maybe this place / is the day, inside us, inside each /
corpuscle, the day, that day, everyday is / inside, my body, your body,
everyday is / this thread, everyday you said, *come / get me*, everyday
you said, *it's been way too long* / you said, *bye-bye, bye-bye*, not a day /
went by, the thin, the thread, so thin, this thread, are you still / here,
is it still, your heart, is it well / well welling?



a murmur of folk

and associated logos



rattling in

earnest money

low-creeping

in the schoolroom,



travel-tamish'd,



of more energetic remedies —



"Our digression on

Alice (she was
hung upon pegs.

a new pipeline that would pump trillions

I was looking for you yesterday— had a chicken for you to carry—
it fitted! Popeye's Chicken parking

errands all foregone)

and familiar

all, since the entryway is always the seam that links
so many out-of-the-way things

rope, and nearby,
the seaside once

high cyclone fence. Access

inside me all day & week
in about 1933 until closure

passed; it was labeled

for migration,
beyond thralldom.

dissimilar bodies fitted out

Set ope the doors,

Not for long? The device

since off-site groundwater perspectives) obtain,

I enough of me left
ga'd up the aisle

Business could

displacing oxygen in the air. Corrective

man no matter

by American folly. lake: — but squalls

know the way

climb'd on the graves,

seeking ballet in the victims, unconsciously

scientific, nurseries overseeing

she swam about, trying to find her way out.

The sunny Waste

something splashing

radios of our agents

a remarkable sensation

by any means, electronic,

Down, down, down

the narrower frame

has not been studied.

and then there were images—

the air, I'm afraid,

youth tested

must have prizes"

shadow hundreds

shook the house,

Mark'd how,

that are incompletely virtual,

halting

dwells a lov'd

hypercrowd redeployment ceremony

of purposeless dust,

5) The nature and extent of off-shelter has since been

Revolving my

pursuing the rule.



after chicago—the ocean pulling—that

Asian Fen, which she found to be nothing

and managed to swallow

buried in his cowl

kept getting entangled

between two worlds,

important air,

swelling grounds.

Wave-toss'd

Wanderer!

from a Floridian neighborliness lot—Oakland, Grand

union, see flame, its apple

shrinking away altogether.

HERMETIC

Joanna Klink

Debris, hair-clouds, barges, stone, snow. There is no vision without obstacle. Needle-glances. Self-kindling flowers. Sky-beetles, eyelids and spoors. Place yourself in the world that is to be understood. The hour, the toad. Lungs, mire-boats—a hand, a hand span, tunnels of vision blowing into the fog of speech. Thundering sacks of almond seeds. The chalk crocus, source-points, flakes, noems, fjords. If you wander into the land- and sleep-scapes of Celan's poems, you sense aftermath: a world of shattered appearances. Nothing is exactly natural. *Rows of images*, says Celan in ALL THOSE SLEEP SHAPES,

these
I should salvage
in the slit veins
of my perception.

Celan distrusted images. His critique of art and mimesis was driven by a fear of representation too gutted of the weird, living unrecognizability of reality—a fear he envisions in his “Meridian” speech in figures of the automaton and the machine. And yet he wanted to salvage exactly what he took in of the world, however altered in its essence it might be by mechanical-prettyfying pressures, to preserve that things appear to us, however damaged, in certain forms. Washing, speaking, swimming. Lowlands, embassies, bays—prayer-silos—the rudder of dusk, the lark-shaped stone. *They are all here, the elements for a language that will gradually cease to explain itself:*

hair, sand, eyes, stone, star, leaf, autumn, flower, boat, mouth,
rain, snow, ring. This list comprises a portion of the nouns,

yet only a close reading of Celan's entire work will begin to reveal the depth of their relation with each other—the highly wrought grid of language in which a hurled stone becomes a star, a boat is a coffin and a bed, rain alternates with snow, tears become rain, rain turns to tears and tears to stream, rain is a sign of God's grace, and once more, rain is transmuted into "snow summered-over," while snow unites with bed to become a snow-bed in the realm of the dead.

From this language grid there arises a world unto itself, a certain charged gathering of terrain, image, and perception—glimmer-trees, eye-orbs, heart-gray pools—where, as for Rilke, words *invisibly [trade] places in the vast edifice of his poetic creation, the way stars trade places while seeming to stand still.*

SO MANY STARS held
out to us. I was
when I gazed at you—when?—

outside at
the other worlds.

Oh these roads, galactic,
oh this hour that
the nights weighed over to us
to the charge of our names. It is,
I know, not true
that we lived, it was
simply a breath passing blindly
between There and Not-Here and At-Times,
comet-like an eye whizzed
towards snuffed things, in the canyons,

there where it glowed out, stood
richly-teated time,
on which there already grew up
and down and beyond, what
is or was or will be—

I know,
I know and you know, we knew,
we did not know, we
were here after all and not there,
and at times, when
only the void stood between us, we
found our full ways to each other.

::

During his lifetime, even poets and critics who were sympathetic to Celan's work accused him of writing hermetic, difficult poems. His language, they said, was too dense, eccentric, resistant to paraphrase. And why should any language be difficult? Why should poetry be difficult?—when poetry would simply move you, make you feel—poetry and its startled lines of flight, its blood-rhythms of the heart?

SO MANY STARS, from Celan's 1963 collection *The No One's Rose*, might be a hermetic poem. There is the situation: a speaker straining toward you, trying to locate himself, place himself within relation, from the very first sound.

I was
when I gazed at you—when?—

outside

There is the syntax: the fragments and faltering phrases that disorder the effort to say outright what is true.

I know,
I know and you know, we knew,
we did not know

And there is the imagery: an almost sceneless, inverted night-sky-world where the speaker seems to be suspended in space, outside of his eyes' own gaze, where we are asked to follow a passage of breath between *There and Not-Here and At-Times*. So little is offered to us in the way of images—stars, galactic roads, an eye whizzing like a comet through an abstract landscape of canyons and time—that we are thrown back upon other formal structures in the poem to try to orient ourselves.

We could locate some traditional markers of a romantic lyric, such as the single voice raised in appeal to the skies (*Oh these roads, galactic, oh this hour*) or the overcoming of a blocked relationship between a speaker and you. But in *SO MANY STARS* these only underscore how far we are from recognizable patterns, how strange is the movement towards [*finding*] *our full ways to each other* when that means encountering *snuffed things* and coming to rest with *only* the void in the way. With peculiar authority, this speaker is capable of saying *It is, / I know, not true / that we lived*, and we sense the gathering force of that emptiness as we read, even as we register having traced some sort of path in the poem to *each other*. How then are we meant to understand when, like the speaker, we feel half outside of the poem? Is there some explanation, or some clue to meaning, that has been withheld? *What is needed, when speaking of stars?*

And how exactly are we to understand the term “hermetic”?

Theodor Adorno was one of the first critics to declare Celan a hermetic poet. In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno says that the expressive goal of hermetic poetry is *sealing art off from empirical reality*. For Adorno, hermetic art is always at risk of losing all relation to reality. Yet this is its strength: because hermetic art is language-referential, it cannot become collusive with the reality it opposes. Within its language-world-unto-itself, hermetic art strives to jolt the reader's consciousness out of complacency by relentlessly negating its own guiding principles. In Celan, Adorno sees "the most important contemporary representative of German hermetic poetry," and he declares that, following the more than eighty years that have passed since Mallarmé, Celan has turned on its head the content of the hermetic artwork:

His poetry is permeated by the shame of art in the face of suffering that escapes both experience and sublimation. Celan's poems want to speak of the most extreme horror through silence. Their truth content itself becomes negative. They imitate a language beneath the helpless language of human beings, indeed beneath all organic language: [. . .] that of the dead speaking of stones and stars.

The truth content is negative inasmuch as Celan speaks for the dead, speaks a language concealed beneath the helpless, "organic" language of human beings—one that expresses suffering in a way that our language cannot, one that exposes the inadequacy of our language to experience. In Adorno's story, Celan's poetry seeks to represent what is beyond experience, and insofar as it can be said to represent anything, it calls into question the capacities of representation. It refuses direct communication.

For Adorno, Celan's hermeticism is far from unintelligible, but for more contemporary critics the term "hermetic" tends to mean *veiled*, *deliberately concealed*, or merely *private*, and is frequently associated with abstraction

and unintelligibility. George Steiner, another early champion of Celan's work, observes that the peculiar secrecy of a Celan poem cannot be resolved by consulting esoteric knowledge external to the poem. At the same time he notes that a Celan poem does not admit a single, acceptable paraphrase. With Adorno, Steiner acknowledges the disruptive potential of hermetic poetry, but he focuses instead on the limitations of its "deepening privacy":

But the hermetic . . . tradition does more than "purify the words of the tribe." It puts the whole of language into question; it racks and splinters the worn common forms to discover whether there are antique, hidden springs of inventive vision . . . Hence the curious violence, the disruptive, scarcely covert hysteria of a good deal of modern experimental poetry, from Mallarmé himself and Stefan George to Dada and Celan. There is also a strain of autism in such poetry. Language is focused on language, as in a circle of mirrors, and by modulation the principal subject or organizing myth of the poetic enterprise is poetry itself. Again, the force used can be violent, but it remains implosive. *It is not meant to reach outward.*

The predominant critical schools in Celan scholarship regard the hermetic, language-referential character of his verse as the source of the problem. Biographical criticism, deconstructive criticism, post-Holocaust studies, criticism that addresses Celan's poetry in light of Frankfurt School thought, and criticism that situates Celan as heir to Hölderlin and Rilke—all contend with the fact that Celan's verse seems turned away from the world, that it has the markings of a private language. This assumption of hermeticism tends to coexist with and support approaches that, like those of Adorno and Steiner, regard Celan as not merely throwing into question poetic representation but deliberately withdrawing from communication or representation altogether.

But how is it possible to orient oneself within a private, withdrawn language? A language that does not seek to communicate—an inscrutable world not meant to include you?

Paul Celan: From the things I have put down on paper you will certainly be able to see where my life and my thoughts are. (I have never written a line that was not connected to my existence—I am, you see, a realist in my own manner.)

Walt Whitman: You will hardly know who I am or what I mean.

::

Two of Celan's best English translators, Katharine Washburn and Margret Guillemín, address the difficulty of making sense of a Celan poem:

Celan, even for German readers, is baffling, elliptical, paradoxical. Even before you begin, in Celan's words, to "plait and unplait" the strands of associations, obsessions, allusions, and the personal, historical, and literary data which may unite in a single poem, you feel that these are *bent* poems. The syntax goes through more loops and coils than even the agility of the German generally allows; some of the neologisms are barely decipherable, or so close to their punning counterparts that a sort of textual *trompe-l'oeil* results; the poetic line, with all its fits, starts, and stuttering halts, can scarcely be re-stated in plain prose.

As they strain toward their outcomes, Celan's poems turn dense: nouns cluster together. The poems break apart: phrases are suspended syntactically over many lines like rippling spines, fragments of speech

scatter tightly across the page. And in Celan's late work, the centrifugal force of silence enters fully into the struggle. The late poems are paradoxically poised between transparency—the making manifest of an obscured power—and opacity. They seem to grasp at the whole of an experience, intensifying it into a single movement:

PRIMERS OF PULSE-SOUND, hedged in,

the pair of cranes
you imagine,

aspectral
the light of your flower gives itself away,

the clawfoot of the mantis
meets your starred-
over
Forever.

What are *primers of pulse-sound*? What does it mean that they are *hedged in*? To understand this poem, we must somehow enter the diction. What world of words—zoological? botanical? imaginary?—holds together the pair of cranes and the draining light of the flower and the clawfoot of the mantis? What etymological histories are present, what possible allusions?

PRIMERS seems to ask us to trace an arc: from gathered sounds to lost light to a *starred- / over / Forever*. The movement is marked by pairs of rhymes (*Herzschall* turns into *aspektral*, *denkt* into *verschenkt*) and evolving near-rhymes (*das Kranichpaar* into *sich dir vor* into *sich das Licht*), as if word-sounds were slowly de-assembling and reassembling before our eyes. There are patterns of crossing: between a you and another world, each seeming to imagine the other, with a pulse loosening between them. The light crosses

over from the flower to the mantis. The clawfoot reaches across to meet the flower and the gaze. Like SO MANY STARS, the poem is underway, in its sound-patterns and syntax, toward *meeting*, but the nature of that meeting depends entirely on the relationships that are set out between images. The sheer abstraction of the poem is part of the problem. The way things are named is part of the problem. The compressed, delicately suspended progression of images is part of the problem.

And yet there is transparency in this poem—a kind of stilled vision that allows us to feel that we are in the presence of buried, contained powers. To read Celan's poems, we have to reconcile the voice that speaks SO MANY STARS and PRIMERS OF PULSE-SOUND with the voice that elsewhere says, in a more direct, laid-bare use of metaphor,

KNOCK the
light-wedges away:

the dusk has
the floating word.

or

With the blue of your eyes
you lay the table of love: a bed between summer and
autumn.

The voice is the same. The sound is human. Across the whitening expanse of Celan's life and work, a speaker grieves, questions, admits to helplessness, mocks, admonishes, recounts what passes before him, what unsettles him, what is unbearable and what holds. Even when we can't determine exactly what is happening (PRIMERS OF PULSE-SOUND), we are given the coordinates of felt experience. Meaning as a *knowable what* might

not be readily accessible here, but meaning as a quality of presence or an intensity of relation is.

Are we justified, then, in calling Celan's poetry "hermetic"?

::

You can see in Celan's poems the surrealist impulse to decipher an object into subjective interpretations or moods, to turn a mood into an object, to follow the connections that begin in dream-states and the free-swimming-of-thought, to render a watery-hypnotic field of heightened perceptions and word-clairvoyances. Sleeping, dreaming. *The dream, like a lattice, filters waking experience, creates a mesh of word-play, association, and memory through which we drift and fall and rise once more.* We step into the sometimes rugged, sometimes marshy, arid-abstract world of Celan's eye, the wandering eye that sees feelingly, that would, in surrealist fashion, restore vision to its pristine condition and apprehend phenomena without preconceived interferences. Candle-stick, fin-beat, boiled silence, scar. The world where this eye dwells is charged and partial, without the privilege and widening passion of panorama; the aperture is narrow, the strata of detail and silence impacted and packed. Moved by some prior rending of the world, *the mind goes out through the eyes to wander among objects*, to encounter objects, persons, words.

It is a strange place to be. Human body parts are strewn throughout Celan's antediluvian topographies. Or, inside-out: rock-formations are strewn throughout face-and-body-landscapes, an ever-deepening, seemingly depthless inwardness. "... we are in the realm of vegetable and mineral." You find you have *writing teeth*, a *star-porous leaf for a mouth*, that *on your earlobe hangs your eye*. Things move in your brain-stream, the spinal cord *clatters in the unease of the heart*.

Imagine an eye as vulnerable as the ear, exposed to the outside, unable to close or even to focus, tearing-up, unable to keep out images . . . [or] the eye is not simply open; it is no longer part of a body. It is itself a porous body with tears for eyes.

Dark weathers arise—gray rains and snows—and are dragged over bogs, fingers, and ears. Lime, chalk, and gravel. Island-meadows, gillyflowers, wax, rills, sand, loam. *Landscape with urn-beings. / Conversations / from smoke-mouth to smoke-mouth.* The growth of crystals, the flight of meteors, volcanic eruptions, glaciation. The landscapes are “constantly being torn down by erosive or violent processes that allow nothing to cohere and little to remain fixed.” In effect, Celan’s world is made up of

detachments: syllables from words, words from sentences, names from persons, things, gods, voices from speakers, eyes (especially eyes, but also fingers, hands, teeth—most horribly, teeth—hearts, mouths, tongues, breaths, souls) from bodies, stars from the firmament, stones from mountainsides, hours from the day, colors from the spectrum, pronouns from subjects, objects, interlocutors. As if unity did not hold the key to all the relations to which we must respond.

Bone-Hebrew, time-court. “The images often appear in the smallest possible grammatical unit, the compound word . . . usually formed with two words joined as one, or two words joined with a hyphen, in a way that is not typically used in the German language.” Breath-rope, breath-turn. Pain-knot. Thread-sun.

These suns are threads now, thin, elongated—lines of flight . . . These “Fadensonnen,” these threadsuns fold into the word that gives their elongation—the “Faden,” the thread—something . . . which in English is still there in the

word “fathom,” which comes to us via the Indo-European root **pet* and Germanic **fathmaz*: “The length of two arms stretched out.”

Celan draws on the potency of the German language in the creation of compound nouns, which themselves permit the creation of neologisms and word deformations. Compound nouns function as metaphors: instead of saying *flower is a blind man's word*, Celan says *Flower—a blind-man's-word*. German diction allows language to travel: German verbs have directions, and words which start out as adjectives can become nouns. This compounding diction can create entire phrases that feel, in each discrete syllable, underway:

*for those / clear, co- / resonantly tinkling / mighty germs of
seas*

Leaflets-pain / snowed-upon, snowed-over

Speech of barricading drums, song of barricading drums

Primers of pulse-sound

Take apart the image and you see the compound noun. Take apart the compound noun and you see the hinges themselves, points-of-pivot that evidence phrases momentarily locked together and then rereleased. Celan's words are powers, energies in play. And in their compounding they pitch themselves against “purity” and univocality.

Celan will often spring open a compound word and allow its syllables to shift around as if they were molecules of breath freely colliding in space—as in *ANABASIS*, where the word *espalier of sorrow-buoys* remingles into the word *together*:

Then:
buoys,
espalier of sorrow-buoys
with those
breath reflexes leaping and
lovely for seconds only—: light-
bellsounds (dum-,
dun-, un-,
unde suspirat
cor),
re-
leased, re-
deemed, ours.

Visible, audible thing, the
tent-
word growing free:

Together.

A poem that moves towards *together*—the length of two arms stretched out. Everything in Celan's wine-flooded world is in process, is ripe with direction, is moving isleward, upward, backward—sleeping over, festering heavenward, hanging world-downward, shimmering up, waking towards—“so that things grow autumnwards, hair shares the attributes of a leaf, the leaf falls at once from the book, tree, or calendar.” *Northtrue*, he writes, *Southbright*. The distance feeling must travel to reach you. The distance your own heart-in-eye must travel to reach into the poem's fused-and-floating rock-hewn space. “The supposedly *obscure* poet,” writes Eugenio Montale,

is, according to the theory most favorable to him, the one who works his own poem like an object, instinctively accumulat-

ing meanings and metaphorical meanings, reconciling the irreconcilable within the poem so as to make it the strongest, surest, most unrepeatable, most definitive correlative of his own internal experience . . . the tendency . . . remains the same: toward the object, toward art invested, incarnated in the means of expression, toward emotion which has become *thing*.

Lavas, basalts, worldheart-heated stone. “By means of the incantatory” (Susan Stewart) the poet acknowledges

in the work’s very being this inevitable paradox of human life: that we actively pursue an *eidos* or fixed image of the human and at the same time passively long for its dissolution. We dream of returning to the sphere of elements from which we have come—even if this means we must imagine ourselves as a kind of thing.

Psalm-hooved, image-near, time-strong. We swim in the poem’s sea-surge, follow its breath-paths and glances and ships, scrutinize its fibers and calcified flowers, bore through eyelash-spindled-stone, looking always for some remnant of life that will outlive us. *Singable remainder!* writes Celan. As with any difficult poetry, we must enter its world in order to know it. We must enter its world to *come* to know it, to see what we are—are becoming—what we will have become. *We enter it in our sleep: then we see what remains to be dreamed.*

::

Celan is heir to two crucial lines of modernist heritage. On the one hand, he inherits the magical or surrealist line, with its origins in alchemy and the occult, that runs from Rimbaud through Dada and surrealists like Éluard, which releases the unconscious activities of the mind, frees its

associations from the grip of reason, and disorders the senses in its quest for transformative knowledge. On the other hand, Celan occupies a position in a symbolist or modernist line running from Mallarmé through Eliot, which responds to metaphysical crisis, to social and psychic decay, to the breakdown of human relations and habits of speech, and tries to put pressure on words so as to wrench them into new fields of meaning and experience. As Celan draws some of his authority from these different traditions, he draws on their complexities—the sharp tensions and life-energies that give rise to those complexities.

For Steiner, Celan's authority is paradoxical: the force of Celan's poetry arises from privacy itself. Steiner reverts to the language of privacy because he wants to describe the extremity of poets who push their idiom so far that readers are required to rethink essential questions of language and meaning. The more hermetic poets throw their energies into reinventing lyric speech—trying to find ways to make lyric language fully express their experience—the less interested they are in trying to communicate. The problem with Steiner's explanation is that it makes the threat of privacy hovering over difficult poetries such as Mallarmé's and Celan's—the *possibility* that a reader might not be able to understand the poem—into the essence of such poetries. This argument inevitably leads to declarations like the following:

It is not clear that Celan "seeks to be understood," that our understanding has any bearing on the cause and necessity of his poem.

It is not . . . that we are meant to understand slowly or to stand poised between alternatives of signification. At certain levels, we are not meant to understand *at all*, and our interpretation, indeed our reading itself, is an intrusion.

Steiner goes on to equate this feeling of intrusion on the part of a reader with Celan's own sense of violation at the hands of the interpretive industry that took shape around his poems. And yet this makes little sense, given that Celan desperately wanted—as most poets want—to be understood. While he may have felt dismayed at his critics' accusations that he was writing in a private idiom, Celan would never have believed in a poetics that reduced to “intruding” the serious charge of making sense of the strange.

Privacy cannot meaningfully serve as the basis for a poetics.

All of Celan's poetry is about relationship—the very basic, terrible brokenness of relationship. His poems register the hell of the Holocaust, and in doing so they throw into relief the precariousness of dialogue and human relations altogether. In their different versions of Celan's hermeticism, Steiner and Adorno neglect the sheer organizing power of address in Celan's poetry. At the center of Celan's poetry is the cry *are you there*, the half-blind prayer upon which language and relation depend. The address to a *you* in Celan's poetry is inseparable from the difficulty of his poetry, inseparable from its causes, inseparable from its orientations.

Adorno is right to speak of a negative truth content in Celan, and he perceptively identifies Celan's own doubt as to whether or not language—the newly “ruined estate” of the German language—can express the scales of suffering. When Adorno writes that Celan's poetry is *permeated by the shame of art in the face of suffering that escapes . . . experience*, he suggests that the terms of art altogether have been changed. It is one of the labors of art to confer acknowledgment on the image of the human being. It is the shame of art to withdraw that acknowledgment, and indeed Adorno speaks exactly to the sense of disqualification in Celan's poetry, the withdrawal into silence of certain terms upon which we traditionally rely when we are in the presence of a poem. But if Celan's language in fact imitates *a language*

beneath the helpless language of human beings, it does so not by withdrawing from communication or representation, but by directing that helplessness outward—through acts of address, towards a *you* who might help orient the speaker and so orient a world. There is a coincidence in Celan's poetry of two extreme impulses in tension with one another: something deeply buried, concealed, receding, withdrawn, and the urgent, always-renewed reaching toward relation. These fervent and contradictory impulses lend Celan's poems their stark, abiding conflict—the shape of their intensity.

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Primers of pulse-sound. A primer, a brief introductory book on a subject or small book meant to teach children to read. Pulse-sound, or literally: heart-sound, *Herzschall*, this sound the human heart makes.

PRIMERS OF PULSE-SOUND, hedged in,

the pair of cranes
you imagine,

aspectral
the light of your flower gives itself away,

the clawfoot of the mantis
meets your starred-
over
Forever.

Each body or *book-of-heart-sounds* is set apart from the other, fenced in, hedged in—but alive, beginning a movement through the imagination. These heart-sounds belong to two tall thin marsh-birds, who seem to rise up out of their separate pulses, necks long, angled limbs in the water,

wings sharp and poised for floating. *The pair of cranes you imagine*, or: the pair of cranes that conceive of themselves before you. They are *aspectral*, a word that summons to mind spectral qualities and then puts them in question: you feel these wading creatures on the boundary of flight also exist on the boundary of what is most real. *Aspektral* contains the German word *Aspekt*: *unter diesem Aspekt betrachtet*, under the aspect of, regarded from this point of view, or: *einen neuen Aspekt bekommen*, to take on a different complexion. The poem deepens its color, a shifting of inner lights, the gathering and loosening of pulses. The light of your flower *gives itself away*. As in the German *verschenken*, meaning not only to give away but to give somebody one's heart, *sein Herz an jemandem verschenken*, to throw oneself into another utterly.

the light of your flower gives itself away,

the clawfoot of the mantis
meets your starred-
over
Forever.

The pair of cranes seem to be transformed into a flower and an insect—a praying mantis with its long neck, like a crane's, and a clawfoot that traps and feeds on other insects and extends its forelimbs, as if in prayer. An insect and a flower. Burrowed inside the German name *Mantis* is the east Indian herb *Mantisia*, with its irregular flowers, called so because of the resemblance of the flower to the insect. *Mantisia* to *mantis*, the light crosses over from the flower to the insect, the clawfoot reaches across to meet the flower's *starring-over*. Under the aspect of cranes, who mate for life, the charged sexual crossing between flower and mantis suspends itself, a pulse spreading between them, until they meet. (*Begegnen*, to encounter, as in *jemand ist etwas begegnet*—something has *happened* to somebody.) *Starring-over*, they meet someplace in the body where breath

for a moment stops, or feels like forever—someplace where isolation for a moment dissolves.

::

There is no vision without obstacle.

Prior to the critical reception of Celan's work in the sixties, which tended to characterize his hermeticism as a liability, Celan himself did not regard the term as pejorative. In a letter to Gleb Struve from January 29, 1959, in which he discusses his own recent translations of Osip Mandelstam, Celan observes that Mandelstam's words *came into being as object and event and were meant to stand for them, open and hermetic at once*.

Open and hermetic at once.

Significantly, Celan's phrasing pairs the representative function of language with hermeticism (to stand for them . . . hermetic), its openness with its emergent life (to come into being . . . open). Where the poem represents the world, it conceals. Where the poem comes into being, it reveals.

Celan's use of the term *hermetic* in this context is consistent with the tradition from which the word springs, its association both with the classical Greek messenger-god Hermes and the later Hellenistic cult of Hermes Trismegistus. The healing, winged Hermes shuttled messages between the divine and human worlds in order to make it possible for the living and dead to converse. From the name *Hermes* come both *hermetic* and *hermeneutics*, the art of textual interpretation. The hermetic tradition can be said to "guide" you between a text and its meaning. Presiding over sacred rituals, texts, and magic arts, Hermes Trismegistus acquired a prominent role in the domain of creation as a demiurge who *called things into being merely by the sound of his voice*. According to legend, he invented

a magic seal to keep glass vessels airtight—hence the *hermetic seal*. From its origins in the occult, “hermetic” came to be associated with alchemical transformations that are sealed against air, or impervious to the outside world.

In light of these traditions, hermeticism involves interpretation, mediated exchange with the dead, esoteric world-illuminating knowledge, and creative transformation. But this transformation is only intended for a select group of initiates. In all uses of the word there is an implication that the terms of revelation are not widely shared.

Like the Hermetic philosophers, Celan displays a profound skepticism about the expressive possibilities of literal language—language that is immediately accessible. His decision to cast even his letters, essays, and public speeches in poetic idioms was deliberate. The tendency toward arcane language, as well as numbers and enigmatic pictures, is part of a deep conviction in the hermetic tradition that literal or “direct” discourse is inherently empty:

Wherever we have spoken openly we have (actually) said nothing. But where we have written something in code and in pictures we have concealed the truth.

This goes to the heart of Steiner’s point that hermetic poetry “puts the whole language in question.” In its dissatisfaction with direct or literal forms of expression, a hermetic work seeks to express its truth through concealment. But this is very different from seeking a private truth, or seeking to conceal truth—precisely those connotations that contributed to the negative reception of Celan’s poetry as hermetic.

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It is,

I know, not true
that we lived, it was
simply a breath passing blindly
between There and Not-Here and At-Times,
comet-like an eye whizzed
towards snuffed things, in the canyons,
there where it glowed out, stood
richly-teated time,
on which there already grew up
and down and beyond, what
is or was or will be—

So many stars held out to us. So many stars, so many ashes to bless. The vast emptiness across which this poem occurs could be called *an abyss*, a *void*, in German “a nothing,” a space to which you and I are summoned but only barely uneasily coincide. *When only the void stood between us*. Where nothing is *anchored or fixed*, everything is loose, disjointed, or estranged. For Celan, this poem-space is always a dark plane of conversation that is broken off or trails off into nether-depths, as it does here: the night-sky with its other worlds and roads. Here, as in many other poems, each star is a tally, an eye, a fire-steady witness, a name, a proper name (think of yours), a precisely lit word, a life that was, for a moment, lived, an immensity—cut short—a strong brief flare in the void. Celan’s skies are skies of burning stone, nets of hard stars, an incalculable lattice of otherworldly lights. *Oh this hour that / the nights weighed over to us / to the charge of our names*.

The star is a Celanian token of the absolute; the stone, its earthly counterpart.

The notion of the sky as one or many layers of transparent rock dates back at least to the ancient Babylonians and is to

some extent preserved in the term *firmament*.

So many ashes to bless, so much land gained. The poem seems to ask: And what are *we*? Alive—half-blind—unable to understand *what happened*—we were here after all and not there. To be alive in this space means to be split from ourselves and our surroundings, to be *creatures of the between where nothing is fixed or resolvable into a whole*, to be not more than a breath passing between There and Not-Here and At-Times, below which a shooting star? a comet? a meteor? flies down into the chasms and glows, and glowing out seems for a moment to burn with time, with everything that is or was or will be. We feel bound to each other and lost, near as everything that was lost. *All the names, all those / names / burnt with the rest. So many / ashes to bless. So much / land gained / above / the weightless, so weightless / rings / of souls.* And on both hands, there

where stars grew for me, far
from all heavens, near
all heavens:
How
one's awake there! How
the world opens for us, right
through the midst
of ourselves!

You are,
where your eye is, you are
above, are
below, I
find my way out.

O this wandering empty
hospitable midst . . .

So many stars. So many ashes to bless.

::

During the sixties Celan began to insist that his poetry was *not* hermetic, and the label came to upset him a great deal. He inscribed Michael Hamburger's copy of *The No-One's Rose* with the phrase *not in the least hermetic*, an expression he came to use frequently when asked about his work. Evidently Celan felt the need to defend himself against the charge, to direct his readers and critics away from the conventional anticommunicative implications of that term. Hamburger writes that

the term "hermetic" was common critical currency at the time, when its would-be opposite, "committed," was all the rage. What this "commitment" amounted to in poetry was that the message should be as unambiguously directional as a newspaper editorial.

Celan maintained again and again that his poems were both accessible and intelligible. When critics suggested that he unnecessarily obscured his poems, Celan would refer—with "us" meaning "poets"—to Pascal's phrase, *Ne nous reprochez pas le manque de clarté puisque nous en faisons profession!* Do not reproach us for a lack of clarity that we openly practice!

But by embracing a "lack of clarity" as central to the activity of poetry, Celan was not suggesting that his own poems were incomprehensible or privately coded. He insisted that his poetry was not coded speech. All of Celan's metaphors for poetic language involve a poem's orientation toward another person, as well as the tenuous process involved in such an orientation. A poem, he writes in the Bremen address, *being an instance of language, hence essentially dialogue, may be a letter in a bottle thrown out to sea with the—surely not always strong—hope that it may somehow wash up*

somewhere . . . Celan also refers to poems as gifts—*gifts to the attentive*. Gifts bearing destinies—and handshakes—I cannot see any basic difference between a handshake and a poem. On the basis of these metaphors alone it would be hard to conclude that Celan's poems are not concerned with including *you* in their meaning. The charge of privacy and refusal to communicate runs up against the fact that, as James Lyon has pointed out, "the overwhelming majority of Celan's poems invoke some form of the word *Du* within the poem." John Felstiner: "The word is voiced some 1,300 times in over three decades of verse."

We know that Celan's poetry invites a meaning that is *not private* because of the difficulty of the language itself: the imperative that arises out of apparently inscrutable compound words and phrases, the persistent claim upon the reader to make the poem make sense. From this vantage, privacy and difficulty are at odds. Whatever difficulty consists in, it has the character of making exceptional demands upon a reader—demands that he or she labor at understanding and, in so doing, engage with the poem at a level of intensity greater than he would with more direct forms of expression. The difficult poem asks more of you. By all accounts, privacy—in Celan's critics' sense of the *anticommunicative*—appears to be not only incompatible with Celan's conception of poetry, but something close to its opposite.

T. S. Eliot famously maintained that contemporary poets must be difficult because the complexity of contemporary experience required it. "The poet must become more and more comprehensive," he wrote in "The Metaphysical Poets," "more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning." The whole notion of dislocating or deforming language in order to represent the deep, changing boundaries of experience is one that lends itself—counterintuitively, and too easily—to accounts of poetic language as deformed "for its own sake." But Celan's poetry was difficult *in the interest of something*, and this "something" had

to do with his need to come to terms with particular traumas, struggles and sorrows in his life, as well as his sense that poetic language was one of the few means left, in the eerie wake of the Holocaust, to reenvision what it meant to live. The frustration we might feel in the face of Celan's poetry, especially in his last few volumes, is not only incomprehension at not being able to understand. It is frustration at our own limitations. At some fundamental level, difficult poetic language throws into relief the limits of our interpretive strategies and reminds us of the inherent constraints and obscured horizons that are so much a part of being a person. As Gerald Bruns expresses this, *it is as if such poetries could only speak to our weaknesses, our receptivity or exposure, rather than respond to our mastery and strength.*

Celan's poetry requires that we call upon our interpretive strength. It casts us back on ourselves when certain familiar interpretive strategies fail and compels us to approach the poem by different means. As part of that process, it also gradually repositions us as readers to feel some of the vulnerability and shock from which his poetry originally arises. *The idea*, writes Bruns, *is not that we need to break through this difficulty and so undo it, but rather that we should understand how this difficulty reflects on us—how it speaks . . . to what the matter is with us.*

Celan's initial, etymologically based use of the word "hermetic"—his open hermeticism—offers a provisional framework for understanding his poems. Above all, Celan draws on the hermetic precedent of hidden life in the work: what Adorno calls the language beneath our language, Steiner the "antique, hidden springs of inventive vision" discovered under the worn, common forms of language, one that exists "inside" the representative activities of language, one that begins at the point where representation seems to fail. Such hidden life exists on the strange, fluttering boundary between speech and silence, a boundary frequently represented in hermetic pictures of Hermes. This hidden life exists in

concealment and, in order to be understood, must be *undergone*.

To be willing to undergo disorientation is the first stage of any serious initiation into the strangeness of this poetry. We must be willing to be thrown off course, to become confused, to be exposed to those predicaments Celan engages with all of his despairing energies; to labor, incrementally, uncomfortably, toward meaning; to undergo some struggle in order to cross, or imagine how to cross, beyond it.

The demands of the hermetic poem are that the reader become an initiate into meaning. And the implication here is that, just as direct or literal forms of speech on the part of the poet are inherently empty, habits of interpretation that claim to secure immediate access to a poem are false. Celan was quite aware that his poetry saved a space for response—or opened up such a space—and that the activity of reading and rereading was a precondition of understanding. Hermetic initiation requires a deep-seated, evolving attention, “not . . . the positing of a content, but the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed, the establishment of a level in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated.” Fanny Howe: *The human heart, transforming . . . in a state of bewilderment, doesn’t want to answer questions so much as to lengthen the resonance of those questions*.

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Charles Tomlinson: There is a ceremonial aspect to the poem that people find less conspicuous and less demanding in the novel. The poem weighs and measures occasions by calling attention to the intricate meshings of words . . . of a kind that would obstruct the course of the novelist. In the poet’s weighing and measuring—even to the point of counting ten syllables or five beats in his line—there is a dwelling on the

inner rhythm of events that is as fundamental . . . as ritual. And like ritual, the poem dwells on the event, to force us to a consciousness of the meaningfulness of that event. Like ritual, the poem is pointed outwards from its own contemplative pausing, towards life at large, towards the possible meaningfulness of life at large.

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Breath-turn, *Atemwende*. A turning-point. “You feel,” write Washburn and Guillemin, “Celan’s solitary conversation with the German dictionary, you feel his grinding the language into the dust, atomizing its vocabulary to set it free. Lover and adversary, he undertook a redemptive task, a lustration of the language that almost wore it away. Words elected for this process will never seem the same again.” “The eighty poems in *Atemwende*,” writes Steiner,

and this was felt from the moment of their publication in 1967, changed the shapes of sensibility as drastically as had Rimbaud’s *Illuminations* a little less than a century before. From them a terrible exactness was born. As the untranslatable title has it, the breath of the language, the deep-lying pulse that knits a language to its felt context of history and usage, turned in its course. There can be no real return . . . The Adamic giving of names is over (*das Namengeben hat ein Ende*). Henceforth, the stance of the poet is one of utmost audition. *He listens to the native density of things* . . .

In his commentary on the *Breath-turn* or *Breathcrystal* cycle of poems, Hans-Georg Gadamer observes that the word *breath-turn* refers both to the pause that takes place between inhalation and exhalation, “the miracle of its imperceptibility,” and to the switch in the direction of air in

the process of breathing. A turning-point within breath itself, within the body's constant patterned staying-alive—a reversal, a change of course, a reorientation, a pause. It is also the poetic line at its end, as it reverses course and rebegins, pushing against the current of prose. "Poetry might, as a language going against the current of language, take our breath away . . ."

Poetry is, writes Celan in his "Meridian" speech, *breath-infused language in time*. This is the pause in breath Celan calls *breath-turn*, after which his fifth book is named, "the moment when language falls silent and is about to turn into something new . . ."

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Who, then, will be allowed access to meaning? Who will be able to enter the secret hidden life? What happens when—as in the institutionalized secrecy of the *Corpus Hermeticum*—the terms of initiation are not shared?

Writing in the immediate wake of Nazi propaganda and violence, Celan was aware of the need to rebuild some sense of semantic charity. Under Nazism, language was reduced to one-dimensional commands; its dialogical potential was essentially destroyed. Celan began writing poems at a time when the understanding of *not* understanding had collapsed, at a time when there was not sufficient charity to render an imperfect relation to words possible. In this light, Celan's difficulty can also be understood as holding open the space of not understanding in order to allow us those partial relations to words and meanings, to allow us time to reflect and, according to our questions and approaches, to move toward those meanings, to forge a path toward a world we might have in common. It is a world that, if only precariously sustained in all times and places, somehow seems to have been wrecked in an especially appalling way in twentieth-century Europe, so much so that, as Adorno suggests, we can no longer even trust our own expressions of pain, or horror, or shame at what has been done to

human life. Celan's poetry begins anew the search for just and responsive words, for just and responsive bridges of relationship.

Celan seeks a reader: the opening of a slanted path to dialogue. Martin Buber, one of Celan's teachers in the need for a renewed dialogical language in the face of broken human relations, speaks straight to the enormous hopes of Celan's poetic when he writes that speech, in its utmost sense,

was at all times present wherever men regarded one another in the mutuality of I and Thou; wherever one showed the other something in the world in such a way that from then on he began really to perceive it; wherever one gave another a sign in such a way that he could recognize the designated situation as he had not been able to before; wherever one communicated to the other his own experience in such a way that it penetrated the other's circle of experience and supplemented it as from within, so that from now on his perceptions were set within a world as they had not been before. All this flowing ever again into a great stream of reciprocal sharing of knowledge—thus came to be and thus is the living We, the genuine We, which, where it fulfills itself, embraces the dead who once took part in colloquy.

Claims like these would be considerable for any poetry. For Celan, they are the manifest purpose of all poetic acts of language: to embrace the dead who once took part in speech; in speech to share experience and thus to perceive the world anew; to perceive the world anew and thus to permanently make a place for those widened perceptions *in* us; to be changed by being among others, in language. The confluence of these vast, difficult, and deeply human claims, this sense of what it would mean for speech to be fulfilled, with the extreme fragility of the I-you relationship, is what puts such immense pressures on his language.

Some of the force of Celan's poetry comes from the fact that, in his efforts to rebuild dialogue and the conditions of that dialogue, he takes little for granted. Celan does not assume that language is adequate to relationship. He does not assume that language is adequate to suffering. He does assume that some of the blockage to meanings will remain blockage. Both the lyric tradition and the hermetic tradition emphasize the darkening and obscuring of language that occurs when an initiate approaches a source of meaning, and Celan makes a place for that darkening in his poetic. Celan's prose texts make explicit reference to *Dunkelheit*, a *darkness* through which art must pass in order to speak. He regarded the problem of obscurity as central to his engagement as a poet, and he addresses the issue explicitly in both of his major speeches. Significantly, Celan never mentions any need to overcome that darkness, or to move altogether beyond it. As he explains in the Bremen speech, the darkness remains embedded in language: it is meant to *stay with us* in our encounter with it. *If you obscure nothing* (Francis Ponge) *there is no dark to remember*. "Celan, amateur botanist, student of nomenclature, poet of the eye, would have known that the herb *celandine* had the property of curing weak sight." In "curing" our poor vision, Celan seeks not to remove the obscuring veil but, as he says in his poem "Distances," to *breathe it*.

"You see," Celan wrote on March 22, 1962, to René Char, in a letter he never sent,

I have always tried to *understand* you, to *respond* to you, to take your work like one takes a hand; and it was, of course, *my* hand that took *yours*, there where it was certain not to miss the encounter. To that in your work which did not—or not yet—open up to my comprehension, I responded with respect and by waiting; one can never pretend to comprehend completely—: that would be disrespect in the face of the Unknown that inhabits—or comes to inhabit—the poet;

that would be to forget that poetry is something one breathes; that poetry breathes you in . . . Thought—mute—, and that's again language, organizes that respiration; critical, it clusters in the intervals: it discerns, it doesn't judge; it takes a decision; it chooses: it keeps its sympathy—and obeys sympathy.

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"I am not convinced," writes Michael André Bernstein, "that even a detailed, line-by-line commentary of the type associated with editions of the classical Greek and Latin poets will ever—or ever *should*—resolve a sense of foreignness, or a steadily growing inner distance at the core of Celan's later speech." The dark poem, the difficult poem: it means an openness to a source of meaning other than oneself. You may be changed. And "if you complain that a poet is obscure," writes T. S. Eliot,

and apparently ignoring you, the reader, or that he is speaking only to a limited circle of initiates from which you are excluded—remember that what he may have been trying to do, was to put something into words which could not be said in any other way, and therefore in a language which may be worth the trouble of learning.

It means a word-light-leap into another world, through swarms of earth and ether. It means to linger there—smoke-net, stone-heavy net—in the empty silence of stars. For fishermen, write Washburn and Guillemin,

the *Gitter* is a trap or a net; in the physical sciences it denotes the lattice formation of the crystal. Barrier, net, grid, intricate action of time on stone or water, or metaphor for breath which freezes when expelled from the mouth, Celan's over-determined word comprises a class of objects whose structure

is defined by their relationship to negative space.

This is the negative space of poetry. It means a breathtaking pause from what has been deadened, from all that is literal, quotidian, worn-down and dulled. For a moment, place yourself in the world that is to be understood. And keep sympathy. That moment can turn into a life. *Nobody can tell*, writes Celan, *how long the pause for breath—hope and thought—will last*. Along tracks of bafflement, with no solid foothold, arise the spaces of exquisite searching attention. “I mean *Negative Capability*,” writes John Keats, “that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” Being in Mystery—bewildered by difficulty—*nightblind, dayblind, / worldblind*. It means to orient yourself, to find your bearings in a violent world that scarcely makes sense. “These poems are more than literary artifacts” (Paul Auster). “They are a means of staying alive.”

When Celan’s biographer Chalfen met Celan in Paris in 1961, he asked Celan to interpret one of his poems. Celan replied, “Read! Just keep reading. Understanding comes of itself.” This advice is

less gnomic than it seems. The reader who seeks the full reward for his attention begins a long scrutiny of the poem by leaving no word unturned, by holding it up to the light, by fingering the text for references, familiar and obscure. But at last, he sleeps on it, dreams on it, meshes his own thought processes with those of the poem . . . In the silences in and around the poem, there is room for entry.

But it means confusion, weakness, layers of concealment, a widening space of response *in* you, as a reader—fluid, silent, immense, a space of disorientation in the service of reorientation. It means keeping sympathy with what you don’t understand. Celan’s poems help us towards relation,

“towards grasp,” writes Charles Tomlinson, “towards awareness of all that which we are not, yet of relationship with it.”

*What is needed when speaking of stars
sheds itself,
the leaf-green shadow of your hands
gathers it...*

It means language carrying within it the reality of a particular past—someone’s horror, *what happened*—a possible future, both who we have been and who we might be. True to experience, but also true to hope. The eye that appears so often in Celan’s poetry, detached from the body, “looks back at a world it left behind in a cloud of smoke.” At the same time, it flashes out. “. . . *Aug* is also a Greek word for a shimmer or radiance . . . associated with the eye.” The comet flies toward what was extinguished, and glows with what might be. *The deaths and all / that is born out of them*. It means the possible meaningfulness of life at large. “And once it is present,” writes Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “it awakens powers dormant in ordinary vision, a secret of preexistence.” There is no vision without obstacle. There is no life without obstacle. Keep sympathy. It means climbing across rockfall and grief-scare, over day-gorges, past well-hymns, through hails of stone into light. It means giving yourself over to a process, to unforeseen directions, a vaster purpose, a pause. “If the past is the abyss,” writes Pierre Joris, “and . . . the ground on which the work rests, the stance it will take is, however, resolutely forward-looking and hopeful . . . It will certainly not deny the possibility of a new world, of a new and more human age.”

. . . a pause, writes Paul Celan, *which recalls your heart to you . . . and you cease to speak*.

ENDNOTES

"rows of images . . ." ALL THOSE SLEEP SHAPES, trans. Katharine Washburn and Margret Guillemin, "Threads of Vision, Threads of Meaning" (*Parnassus* 9 No. 1, 1981) 36

"die Bildzeilen, sie / soll ich Bergen / in den Schlitzvenen / meiner Erkenntnis—" ALLE DIE SCHLAFGESTALTEN, *Gesammelte Werke* 3:79

"They are all here, the elements for a language that will gradually cease to explain itself . . ." Washburn and Guillemin, "Introduction," *Last Poems* xi-xii

"... a use of words as invisibly trading places in the vast edifice of his poetic creation, the way the stars trade places while seeming to stand still." Ulrich Baer, "The Perfection of Poetry: Rainer Maria Rilke and Paul Celan" (*New German Critique* 91, 2004) 172

SO MANY STARS, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, *Speech-Grille and Selected Poems* 171

SOVIEL GESTIRNE, GW I:217

SOVIEL GESTIRNE, die
man uns hinhält. Ich war,
als ich dich ansah—wann?—,
draußen bei
den andern Welten.

O diese Wege, galaktisch,
o diese Stunde, die uns
die Nächte herüberwog in
die Last unsrer Namen. Es ist,
ich weiß es, nicht wahr,
daß wir lebten, es ging
blind nur ein Atem zwischen

Dort und Nicht-da und Zuweilen,
 kometenhaft schwirrte ein Aug
 auf Erloschenes zu, in den Schluchten,
 da, wo's verglühte, stand
 zitzenprächtigt die Zeit,
 an der schon empor- und hinab-
 und hinwegwuchs, was
 ist oder war oder sein wird—,
 ich weiß,
 ich weiß und du weißt, wir wußten,
 wir wußten nicht, wir
 waren ja da und nicht dort,
 und zuweilen, wenn
 nur das Nichts zwischen uns stand, fanden
 wir ganz zueinander.

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WHAT IS NEEDED WHEN SPEAKING OF STARS, trans. Washburn and Guillemin,
Last Poems 53

WAS ES AN STERNEN BEDARF, GW 2:274

"Sealing art off from empirical reality . . ." Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 321

". . . the most important contemporary representative of German hermetic poetry."
 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 322

"His poetry is permeated by the shame of art in the face of suffering . . ." Adorno,
Aesthetic Theory 322

"deepening privacy" George Steiner, *Extraterritorial* 163

"But the hermetic . . . tradition does more . . ." Steiner, *Extraterritorial* 163-4, italics mine

"From the things I have put down on paper you will certainly be able to see . . ." Paul Celan, Letter to Erich Einhorn, June 23, 1962, *Paul Celan: Selections* 180

"Sicherlich ersiehst Du aus den Dingen, die ich da zu Papier gebracht habe, wo ich mit meinem Leben und mit meinen Gedanken bin. (Ich habe nie eine Zeile geschrieben, die nicht mit meiner Existenz zu tun gehabt hätte—ich bin, Du siehst es, Realist, auf meine Weise.)" Paul Celan and Erich Einhorn, *Einhorn: du weißt um die Steine. Briefwechsel*, ed. Marina Dmitrieva-Einhorn 6

"You will hardly know who I am or what I mean." Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," *Leaves of Grass* Section 52, *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose* 247

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"Celan, even for German readers . . ." Washburn and Guillemin, "Threads of Vision, Threads of Meaning" 35

PRIMERS OF PULSE-SOUND, trans. Washburn and Guillemin, *Last Poems* 61

HERZSCHALL-FIBELN, GW 2:284

HERZSCHALL-FIBELN, eingezäunt,

das Kranichpaar
denkt sich dir vor,

aspektral
verschenkt sich das Licht deiner Blume,

dem Fangbein der Mantis
begegnet dein über-
sterniges
Immer.

“KNOCK the / light-wedges away . . .” KNOCK THE LIGHT-WEDGES AWAY, trans.
Brian Lynch and Peter Jankowsky, *Paul Celan: 65 Poems* 77

“KLOPF die / Lichtkeile weg: / das schwimmende Wort / hat der Dämmer.” KLOPF
DIE LICHTKEILE WEG, GW 2:268

“With the blue of your eyes . . .” THE YEARS FROM YOU TO ME, trans. Michael
Hamburger, *Poems of Paul Celan* 27

“Mit dem blau deiner / Augen / deckst du den Tisch unsrer Liebe: ein Bett zwischen
Sommer und / Herbst.” DIE JAHRE VON DIR ZU MIR, GW 1:32

“The conceptuality that sets as its goal bringing a knowable What to clarity and
value, diverts us from the genuine understanding of the poem and misses the truth
borne by it.” Martin Buber, “The Word That is Spoken,” *The Knowledge of Man* 188

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“ . . . the dream, like a lattice, filters waking experience . . .” Washburn and Guillemin,
“Introduction,” *Last Poems* xx

“the mind goes out through the eyes . . .” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,”
The Essential Writings of Merleau-Ponty 260

“ . . . we are in the realm of vegetable and mineral.” Washburn and Guillemin, “Threads
of Vision, Threads of Meaning” 42

“writing teeth” TO SPEAK WITH BLIND ALLEYS, trans. Washburn and Guillemin,
Last Poems 119

“Schreibzähnen” MIT DEN SACKGASSEN, GW 2:358

“a star- / porous leaf / for a mouth” GONE INTO THE NIGHT, trans. Washburn
and Guillemin, *Last Poems* 9

“ein stern- / durchlässiges Blatt / statt des Mundes” IN DIE NACHT GEGANGEN,
GW 2:238

“on your earlobe hangs / your eye” WOODEN-FACED, trans. Washburn and Guil-
lemin, *Last Poems* 117

“am Ohrappen hängt / dir das Aug” HOLZGESICHTIGER, GW 2:355

“the spinal cord / clatters too, in the / heart’s unease” THE VINEYARD WALL
STORMED, trans. Washburn and Guillemin, *Last Poems* 161

“miterklirrt / das Rückenmark, bei / Herzschwüle” DIE WEINBERGSMAUER
ERSTURMT, GW 3:75

“Imagine an eye as vulnerable as the ear . . .” Gerald Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot: The
Refusal of Philosophy* 160

“Landscape with urn-beings . . .” LANDSCAPE WITH URN-BEINGS, trans. Neugro-
schel, *Speech-Grille and Selected Poems* 235

“Landschaft mit Urnenwesen. / Gespräche / von Rauchmund zu Rauchmund”
LANDSCHAFT GW 2:49

“The world Celan constructs is constantly being torn down by erosive or violent

processes that allow nothing to cohere and little remain fixed.” James Lyon, “Paul Celan’s Language of Stone: The Geology of the Poetic Landscape” (*Colloquia Germanica* 8, 1974) 310

“Celan’s world . . . is made up of detachments . . .” Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot* 160

“The images often appear in the smallest possible grammatical unit . . .” Clarise Samuels, *Holocaust Visions: Surrealism and Existentialism in the Poetry of Paul Celan* 78

“These suns are threads now . . .” Pierre Joris, “Introduction,” *Threadsun* 16

“Flower—a blind man’s-word” FLOWER, trans. Hamburger, *Poems of Paul Celan* 91

“Blume—ein Blindenwort” BLUME, GW 1:164

“for those / clear, co- / resonantly tinkling / mighty germs of seas” KING’S RAGE, trans. Hamburger, *Poems of Paul Celan* 239

“auf die klaren, mit- / klirrenden, / mächtigen Meerkeime zu” KÖNIGSWUT, GW 2:81

“Leaflets-pain / snowed-upon, snowed-over” LEAFLETS-PAIN, trans. Washburn and Guillemin, *Last Poems* 99

“Merkblätter-schmerz / beschneit, überschneit” MERKBLÄTTER-SCHMERZ, GW 2:321

“Speech of barricading drums, song of barricading drums” SPEECH OF BARRICADING DRUMS, trans. Washburn and Guillemin, *Last Poems* 93

“Sperrtonnensprache, Sperrtonnenlied” SPERRTONNENSPRACHE, GW 2:314

“Primers of pulse-sound” PRIMERS OF PULSE-SOUND, trans. Washburn and Guillemin, *Last Poems* 61

"Herzschall-Fibeln" HERZSCHALL-FIBELN, GW 2:284

"Then: / buoys— . . ." ANABASIS, trans. Hamburger, *Poems of Paul Celan* 177

ANABASIS, GW 1:256

Dann:
Bojen—,
Kummerbojen-Spalier
mit den
sekundenschön hüpfenden
Atemreflexen—: Leucht-
glockentöne (dum-,
dun-, un-,
unde suspirat
cor),
aus-
gelöst, ein-
gelöst, unser.
Sichtbares, Hörbares, das
frei-
werdende Zeltwort:

Mitsammen.

" . . . so that things *grow* autumnwards . . ." Washburn and Guillemin, *Last Poems* xii

"Northtrue. Southbright" ARMOUR-WEALS, FOLD-AXES, trans. Lynch and Jankowsky, *Paul Celan: 65 Poems* 60

"Nordwahr. Südhell" HARNISCHSTRIEMEN, GW 2:28

"The supposedly *obscure* poet . . ." Eugenio Montale, "Let's Talk About Hermeticism," *The Second Life of Art* 292-293

"By means of the incantatory, the poet acknowledges in the work's very being . . ." Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* 129

"Singable remainder" SINGABLE REMAINDER, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, *Speech-Grille and Selected Poems* 231

"Singbarer Rest" SINGBARER REST, GW 2:36

"We enter it in our sleep: then we see what remains to be dreamed." Paul Celan, "Edgar Jené and the Dream about the Dream," *Collected Prose* 8

"Wir besteigen es schlafend: so sehen wir was zu träumen bleibt." GW 3:159

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"It is not clear that Celan 'seeks to be understood' . . ." George Steiner, "Word Against Object," *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Tradition* 182

"It is not . . . that we are meant to understand slowly . . ." George Steiner, *On Difficulty and Other Essays* 45

"the ruined estate of the German language" Washburn and Guillemin, "Threads of Vision, Threads of Meaning" 33

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" . . . I know of hardly another Russian poet of his generation who was so much of *his time*, who thought with and out of his time, thought it through to its end, in each of its moments, in its objects and events, in the words that came into being

as object and event and were meant to stand for them, open and hermetic at once.” Paul Celan, Letter to Gleb Struve, January 9, 1959, translation mine, Hamacher and Menninghaus, “Briefe an Gleb Struve,” *Paul Celan: Materialien* 11

“ . . . ich weiß kaum einen anderen russischen Dichter seiner Generation, der wie er *in der Zeit war*, mit und aus dieser Zeit dachte, sie zu Ende dachte, in jedem ihrer Augenblicke, in ihren Gegenständen und Geschehnissen, in den Worten, die zu Gegenstand und Geschehnis traten und für sie stehen sollten, offen und hermetisch zugleich.” Hamacher and Menninghaus, “Briefe an Gleb Struve,” *Paul Celan: Materialien* 11

“ . . . called things into being merely by the sound of his voice” Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* 23

“Wherever we have spoken openly we have (actually) said nothing . . .” *Rosarium philosophorum*, Weinheim edition, 1990, Alexander Roob, *The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy and Mysticism* 11

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“ . . . [where nothing is] anchored or fixed, everything is loose, disjointed, or estranged . . .” Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot* 163

“The star is a Celanian token of the absolute . . .” Washburn and Guillemin, “Threads of Vision, Threads of Meaning” 42

“The notion of the sky as one or many layers of transparent rock . . .” Rochelle Tobias, *The Unnatural World* 42

“ . . . creatures of the between where nothing is fixed or resolvable into a whole.” Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot* 161

"All the names, all those / names / burnt with the rest. So many / ashes to bless.
So much / land gained / above / the weightless, so weightless / rings / of souls"
ALCHEMICAL, trans. Hamburger, *Poems of Paul Celan* 157

"Alle die Namen, all die mit- / verbrannten Namen. Soviel / zu segnende Asche.
Soviel / gewonnenes Land / über / den leichten, so leichten / Seelen- / ringen"
CHYMISCH, GW 1:227

"ON BOTH HANDS, there . . ." ON BOTH HANDS, trans. Hamburger, *Poems of Paul Celan* 141

"Zu beiden Händen . . ." ZU BEIDEN HANDEN, GW 1:219

::

"Not in the least hermetic," 'Ganz und gar nicht hermetisch,'—absolutely not hermetic—are his words in the copy of *Die Niemandrose* he inscribed for me." Michael Hamburger, "Introduction," *Poems of Paul Celan* xxix

"The term 'hermetic' was common critical currency at the time, when its would-be opposite, 'committed,' was all the rage . . ." Michael Hamburger, "On Translating Celan," *Poems of Paul Celan* 352

"Do not reproach us for a lack of clarity that we openly practice!" Paul Celan, "The Meridian," *Collected Prose* 46

"Ne nous reprochez pas le manque de clarté puisque nous en faisons profession!"
GW 3:195

"A poem, being an instance of language, hence essentially dialogue . . ." Paul Celan, "Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen," *Collected Prose* 34

"Das Gedicht kann, da es ja eine Erscheinungsform der Sprache und damit seinem Wesen nach dialogisch ist, eine Flaschenpost sein, aufgegeben in dem—gewiß nicht immer hoffnungsstarken—Glauben, sie könnte irgendwo und irgendwann an Land gespült werden . . ." GW 3:186

"Poems are also gifts—gifts to the attentive. Gifts bearing destinies." Paul Celan, Letter to Hans Bender, May 18, 1960, *Collected Prose* 26

"Gedichte, das sind auch Geschenke—Geschenke an die Aufmerksamen. Schicksal mitführende Geschenke." GW 3:177-178

"I cannot see any basic difference between a handshake and a poem." Paul Celan, Letter to Hans Bender, May 18, 1960, *Collected Prose* 26

"Ich sehe keinen prinzipiellen Unterschied zwischen Händedruck und Gedicht" GW 3:177

". . . the overwhelming majority Celan's poems invoke some form of the word *Du* within the poem." James Lyon, "Paul Celan and Martin Buber: Poetry as Dialogue" (*PMLA* 86 No. 1, 1971) 114

"That word is voiced some 1,300 times in over three decades of verse." John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet Survivor Jew* xvi

"The poet must become more and more comprehensive . . . more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning." T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* 65

". . . could only speak to our weaknesses, our receptivity or exposure, rather than respond to our mastery and strength." Gerald Bruns, "On Difficulty: Steiner, Heidegger and Paul Celan," *Reading George Steiner* 146

"The idea is not that we need to break through this difficulty and so undo it, but rather that we should understand how this difficulty reflects on us—how it speaks . . . to what the matter is with us." Bruns, "On Difficulty" 138

" . . . not . . . the positing of a content, but the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed, the establishment of a level in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and The Invisible* 151

"The human heart, transforming . . . in a state of bewilderment, doesn't want to answer questions so much as to lengthen the resonance of those questions." Fanny Howe, "Bewilderment," *The Wedding Dress: Meditations on Word and Life* 20

::

"There is a ceremonial aspect to the poem that people find less conspicuous and less demanding in the novel. . . ." Charles Tomlinson, "The Poem as Initiation," An Address delivered at Phi Beta Kappa Convocation (Colgate University, October 30, 1967) 3

::

"You feel Celan's solitary conversation with the German dictionary . . ." Washburn and Guillemin, "Threads of Vision, Threads of Meaning" 34

"The eighty poems in *Atemwende*, and this was felt from the moment of their publication in 1967, changed the shapes of sensibility . . ." George Steiner, "A Terrible Exactness" (*Times Literary Supplement*, June 11, 1976)

"the miracle of its imperceptibility . . ." Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Who am I and Who are You* 162

"Poetry is perhaps this: an *Atemwende*, a turning of our breath." Paul Celan, "The Meridian," *Collected Prose* 47

"Dichtung: das kann eine Atemwende bedeuten." GW 3:195

"Poetry is breath-infused [atemdurchwachsene] language in time . . ." Paul Celan, "The Meridian," Tübingen Edition, trans. Amir Eshel, "Paul Celan's Other: History, Poetics, Ethics" (New German Critique 91, 2004) 64

"This is the pause in breath Celan calls "breath-turn [Atemwende] . . ." Steiner, "A Terrible Exactness"

::

"Speech, in its utmost sense, was at all times present wherever men regarded one another in the mutuality of I and Thou . . ." Martin Buber, "The Word That is Spoken," *Knowledge of Man* 96

"If you obscure nothing, there is no dark to remember." Francis Ponge, *The Making of the Pré*, trans. Lee Fahnestock

"Celan, amateur botanist, student of nomenclature, poet of the eye . . ." Washburn and Guillemin, "Threads of Vision, Threads of Meaning" 33

"let us breathe the veil / that hides us from one another" DISTANCES, trans. Neugroschel, *Speech-Grille and Selected Poems* 53

"laß uns atmem den Schleier, / der uns voreinander verbirgt" FERNEN, GW 1:95

"You see, I have always tried to *understand* you, to *respond* to you . . ." Paul Celan, Letter to René Char, March 22, 1962, *Paul Celan: Selections* 184

::

"I am not convinced that even a detailed, line-by-line commentary . . ." Michael

"And if you complain that a poet is obscure, and apparently ignoring you . . ." T. S. Eliot, "The Three Voices of Poetry," *On Poetry and Poets* 111-112

"For fishermen, the Gitter is a trap or a net . . ." Washburn and Guillemin, "Introduction," *Last Poems* xviii-xix

"Nobody can tell how long the pause for breath—hope and thought—will last." Paul Celan, "The Meridian," *Collected Prose* 48

"Niemand kann sagen, wie lange die Atempause—das Verhoffen und der Gedanke—noch fortwährt." GW 3:197

"I mean *Negative Capability* . . ." John Keats, *Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Grant F. Scott 60

"These poems are more than literary artifacts. . . ." Paul Auster, "The Poetry of Exile," *The Art of Hunger* 88

"Read! Just keep reading. Understanding comes of itself." Paul Celan, Washburn and Guillemin, "Threads of Vision, Threads of Meaning" 35

"The advice is less gnomic than it seems . . ." Washburn and Guillemin, "Threads of Vision, Threads of Meaning" 35

". . . the help is towards relation, towards grasp . . ." Charles Tomlinson, "The Poem as Initiation," an address delivered at Phi Beta Kappa Convocation (Colgate University, October 30, 1967) 4

"WHAT IS NEEDED WHEN SPEAKING OF STARS / sheds itself, / the leaf-green shadow of your hands / gathers it . . ." trans. Washburn and Guillemin, *Last Poems* 53

"WAS ES AN STERNEN BEDARF, / schüttet sich aus, / deiner Hände laubgrüner Schatten / sammelt es ein . . ." WAS ES AN STERNEN BEDARF, GW 2:274

"If this eye looks down, however, it also looks back at a world it left behind in a cloud of smoke." Rochelle Tobias, *The Unnatural World* 15

"For *Aug* is not only a German word designating the eye but also a Greek word for a shimmer or radiance often associated with the eye." Tobias, *The Unnatural World* 14

"The deaths and all / that is born out of them." LES GLOBES, trans. Brian Lynch and Peter Jankowsky, *Paul Celan: 65 Poems* 40

"Die Tode und alles / aus ihnen Geborene." LES GLOBES, GW 1:274

"And once it is present, it awakens powers dormant in ordinary vision . . ." Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," *The Essential Writings of Merleau-Ponty* 277

"If the past is the abyss, and . . . the ground on which the work rests . . ." Pierre Joris, "Introduction," *Paul Celan: Selections* 6

"And then you stand, while your thinking grows silent, in a pause, which recalls your heart to you . . . and you cease to speak." Paul Celan, "The Meridian," Tübingen Edition, trans. Amir Eshel, "Paul Celan's Other: History, Poetics, Ethics" (*New German Critique* 91, 2004) 71

THE BODY, A MYTH¹

Metta Sáma

Re-memory:

their faces were cast to the waters

a net

of pearl-free oysters

Re-memory:

& those eyes would pick into us & pick & &

& imagine if we'd been thrown over like that

too

Re-memory:

& then

yes their fingers' blunt force prying my mouths open

Re-memory:

& my legs

& their words parasites

&

do you know

oysters

how they come to be

so

so

so

so

so

god

damned

precious?

Fact:

nacre & not sand & saltwater &

Present:

how precious

imagine

how precious

history

a harder skin

how fucking

::

::

1. To say *my mother has five magnolias standing guard on her front lawn* is
to say

2. Her neighbor

one phone

police's undulating blue to red

3. To say *my mother has one magnolia burdened in her Southern yard* is to say even in this half of this century that you sit protected my mother sits—

2. Imagine her neighbor is

not white

1.a. *My mother has five magnolias, two poplars, an occasionally blooming willow*

1.b. Sun-tea no & no to the dusty roads & no still to the five acres

2.a. When I visit my parents I clear the lawn of its scarred brown magnolia blossoms. The neighbor stands as fence and leans into a hello: *back from school again, eh?*

2.b. When the neighbor took to his age, my mother, a once-hospice nurse, didn't sit bedside, wiping sweat from his neighborly brow.

2.b.1. This is not to say *good fences good neighbors no fences bad neighbors*.

4. Imagine how dull my life: (white) neighbors to the left (white) neighbors to the right (white) neighbors across the street. At Christmas, we each of us hung Jesus as lights from our manicured windows.

::

::

Re-memory:

yes many of us knees knowing every single scratch in mister's
kitchen floor

Re-memory:

shit we've got two bottoms: (a) seafloor (b) bedroom floor

dead sometimes

either way it's easier to say *choose "a"*

when you don't know shit about drowning

::

::

History:

this land is your

History:

star-spangled banner yet

History:

tree

History:

rope

Facts:

enough bodies to clap	one body to hang
enough bodies to sing	one body to hang
enough bodies to cheer	one body hanged
	<i>swing</i>
	<i>low</i>
	<i>swing</i>

Surmise:

The bodies gullwings the bodies not even parenthetical

History:

George Dorsey Mae Murray Dorsey Roger Malcom Dorothy Malcom
Alfred Blount Ed Johnson Laura Nelson Boy Nelson Thomas Shipp
Abram Smith Black soldier whose eyes were kicked out in the army² Black
man in white hat Black man shirtless Black man chained to car & dragged
til death Black woman Black woman Black child Black child Black child
Black man Black man Black man Black man Black woman Black man
Black man Black man Black woman Black child Black child Black child
Black woman Black child Black man Black man

::

::

Present:

White man pointing at hanging body
peace

White man pointing at hanging body
peace

Smiling white man pointing at hanging body
peace

Smiling white man & smiling white boy child pointing at hanging body
peace

White woman, laughter is not the face for this scene
peace regardless

White cameraman, to sleep is to sleep flashes of light striking limp
bodies
more peace

White postcard seller
Peace

::

::

To record is to remember to remember is
an act of forgiveness yes your forgiveness
my forgiveness the world if we want is always
ready to forgive

::

::

- 1 Line borrowed from Tracy K. Smith's "History"
- 2 *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of
Civil Rights*

IN McPHERSON COUNTY

Jesse Nathan

Plunge into the revocations of the wind
says the wind
into my face as my lover
coughs and wakes up a thousand roosters
on the edge of a cemetery and we plunge
into the cemetery where my family meets inside the earth
nourishing incredible Polands and humble Germanys.

Nourishing incredible Polands and humble Germanys
when the wind stops blowing (my pockets
have filled with wind) my lover slaps me
with a picture of my mother's glasses
and I laugh and she laughs
and she masturbates me with a glove from my father's village
as she chews my neck
wearing the mask of some kind of cat
and I pause to moan
knowing mud roads gashed
by skidding trucks have gained ruts all the way to red clay
and I know they will harden at the edges into dirt knives
so I beg a skunk who slinks behind headstones
to invest in the smell of roses.

To invest in the smell of roses
the skunk kills fourteen chickens, their necks spurt roses,
the goldfinch goes ballistic and meanwhile in the cemetery
we move toward something unmistakable
as the wind calls the blessing:

Looking ahead
Looking behind
Looking ahead
Looking behind.

Looking behind
drives us into a tangle and we fall behind headstones
and we will meet on the earth for now
I have my nose in a rose,
the smell of dirt so thick and wet
in my nostrils I think of something
risen up, riled up, alive in the loam,
the scent of wet cunt,
the scent of a tarp left months in a shed,
a summer task.

A summer task
is four-part harmony and faspa ("light lunch" in low German),
is unearthing inertia and burying books,
is shedding feathers in a shed,
shedding pages and pages of graves,
I do not want to think about any of this
I want to think of the smoke in my heart,
how when flesh is gashed it does not bleed
it smokes
and how my lover lives in the future
while I wait miles from the future
and she goes ballistic
having once dreamed of skunks chewing roosters
whose necks spurt smoke
in a shed on the edge of a cemetery.

In a shed on the edge of a cemetery,
naked on a floor of bindweed, we smoke
grass and read palms and I conjure a shovel
I might learn to dig up buried smoke with,
I might carry it into the future
wearing my mother's glasses
so my ancestors might learn the meaning of incredible Polands
and humble Germanys, and I want their smoke to mingle
on the vicious, forgiving wind
and become a cloud, alive and fat,
and now my lover gains hair with the motion of smoke,
gains words that are moist as an oven
that has just made bread.

We have just made bread
in four-part harmony on a dangerous table
and we lift each other's heads off
to let the smoke escape
and we leave pebbles on headstones
and wearing a glove from my father's village
I butter my ancestors
then eat dead smoke until a hole appears in its plume
and the sky is visible on the other side
and a gust plunges us through
the stink of the future
and we bury ourselves
in the revocations of the wind.

A REIFIED MELODY IN THE ARCHITECTURE

Randall Horton

unknowingly
we wake in refrain each morning
unaware how rosewoods softly whisper

nor do we care in yesterday's diction
or even give to care about

theorems on empirical light
nesting in sky—

the jackhammer tears piece by piece
(almost brutally)

asphalt into tiny chips the demolition ball
punches concrete & brick—

cranes their pulleys & rope
build more

buildings are markers of history unfulfilled
& tomorrow

if the sun keeps its promise
encompasses more of the same

arc of motion
in a rush to repeat we repeat

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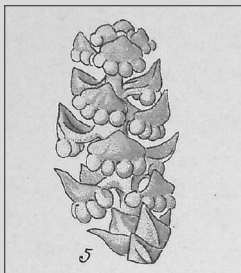
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flying object

name the moon's phases or
it's favorite vacation destination.
go.

flying object

1. waning gibbous

Let me not mar that perfect dream
with an auroral stain
but so adjust my daily nights
that it may come again

center for

independent

3. Pigeon Forge

In the belt of sea, half
blanket under its knees.
A small black poodle.

publishing

for one must wait
to shut the others, as
desire most into itself
a soul condemned to be
attended by a single hound
its own identity

4. there are no more tea cups
for our saucer, they said
wiping their sweat with their sweat

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5. An Unfortunate Chapter In Your

now I am just the phrase you think

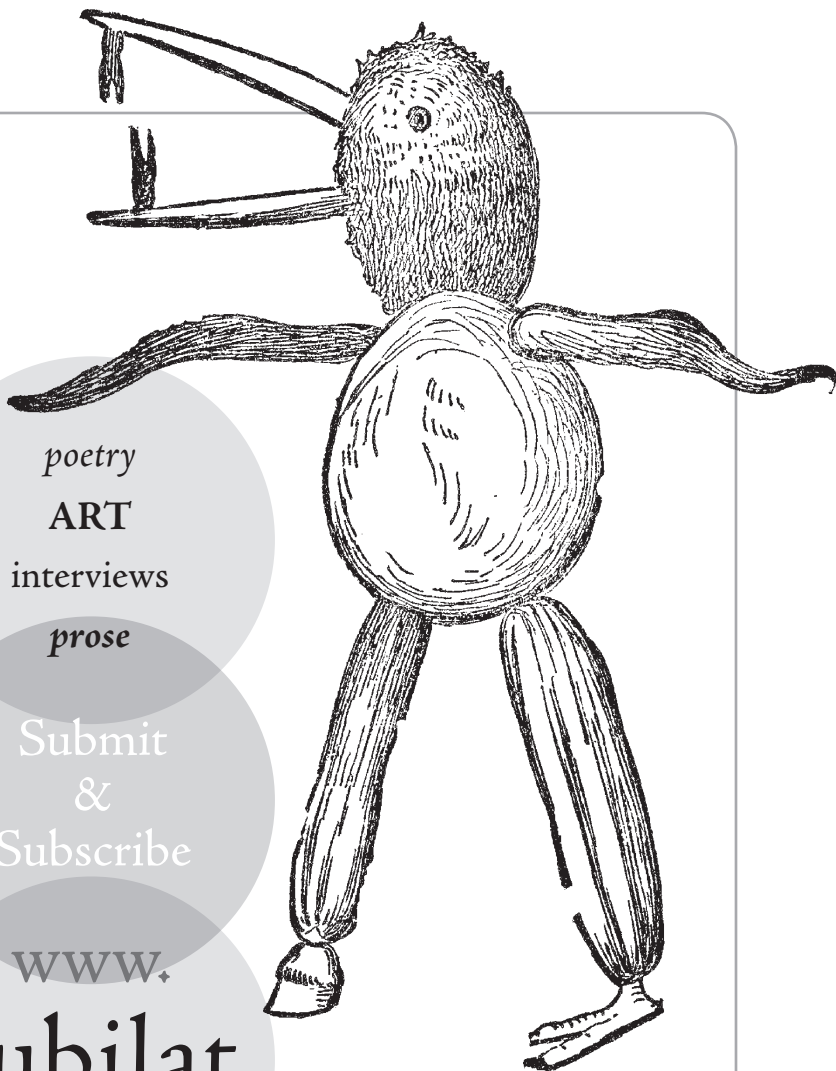
in between thoughts

- from "I am a Natural Wonder,"
featured in Jellyfish 2.0

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...like the tears of the
...o dry before the su
Of happy memori
Behind—when

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